

J. T. Krul • V Ken Marion
Juan Fernandez • Josh Reed

#1
OF 5
COVER A

Qirwi™





Vol. 2

#1

OF 5

COVER B

J. C. KRUL • V. KEN MARION
JUAN FERNANDEZ • JOSH RECO

JirniTM

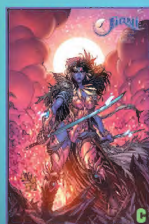
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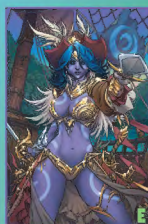
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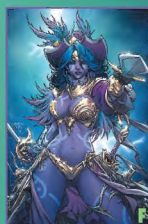
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" t h e b l a c k r o c k "

VOLUME TWO - CHAPTER ONE OF FIVE

Written by J.T. KRUL • Pencils by V KEN MARION
Digital Inks by MARK ROSLAN • Colors by JUAN FERNANDEZ
Letters by JOSH REED

PREVIOUSLY:

Ara has returned—and has left more than her homeland behind, as her journey brings her to sea along with Boro and his band of pirates. However, what new wonders—and dangers—await Ara on their next stop? And will she be able to survive the experience? The world of Jirni explodes into uncharted territory as Ara's epic story continues!

JIRNI created by: J.T. Krul

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Jirni™ Vol. 2 Issue 1

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THE TENALI OCEAN.

PULL!
DAMN
YOU!

THERE'S A
DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN PIRATES
AND ORDINARY
THIEVES.

THIEVES BELIEVE
THE WORLD IS HARSH
AND UNFORGIVING. THAT IT
IS BENT ON BEATING THEM,
CRUSHING THEM, DEVOURING
THEM. THEY STEAL BECAUSE
THEY THINK IT'S THE ONLY
WAY TO SURVIVE.

WE'LL BE AT
THE **BOTTOM**
OF THE OCEAN IF
WE DON'T GET
THE MAIN SAIL
DOWN!

PIRATES KNOW
BETTER. THEY UNDERSTAND
THAT THE WORLD DOESN'T
CARE ABOUT THEM. ANYMORE
THAN THE WIND CARES ABOUT
THE LEAVES IT BLOWS ALONG
THE SKY.

THEY DO WHAT
THEY DO BECAUSE
THEY CAN.

IT'S NO
USE!

TRY
HARDER,
LADS!

ME--I HAVE MY
OWN COMPASS. MY
OWN PATH.



THEN AGAIN,
I'M NOT A PIRATE.
I'M JUST HITCHING
A RIDE.





I CANNOT
TELL IF BORO IS
SMART OR MERELY
LUCKY. ONE THING IS
FOR CERTAIN--HE
IS BRASH AND
BOASTFUL.

BUT,
HAVING BEEN
STRANDED OUT AT
SEA ON MY LITTLE SKIFF,
I COULD HARDLY BE
PICKY ABOUT MY
RESCUERS.

WHEN THEY
FOUND ME, MOST
OF HIS CREW WANTED TO
KILL ME--OR DO EVEN
WORSE THINGS TO
MY BODY.

YET, BORO
SAW VALUE IN
ME. ONCE I SLAYED
THREE OF HIS
MEN.

FOR
SOMEONE
WHO *HATES* THE
WATER SO
MUCH--

--YOU
SURE SPEND
A GREAT DEAL OF
TIME LOOKING
AT IT.

WHAT
MAKES
YOU THINK I
HATE THE
WATER?

PHYSICALLY,
YOU ARE AN
EXQUISITE SPECIMEN.
BUT YOUR *SEA LEGS*
LEAVE A LOT TO
BE DESIRED.

AND THE WAY
YOU GAZE TO THE *HORIZON*--
NOT WITH A SENSE OF EXCITEMENT
OR WONDER. BUT WITH LOSS AND
LONGING. AS IF YOU CANNOT
WAIT TO GET OFF THIS
VESSEL.



PERHAPS
I HAVE BETTER
THINGS TO DO WITH MY
TIME ON THIS WORLD
THAN WANDER
AIMLESSLY.

AIMLESS?
IS THAT HOW YOU
SEE ME?

YOU LIVE
BY NO RULES. YOU
DO WHAT YOU WANT.
GO WHICHEVER WAY
THE WIND STRIKES
YOU.



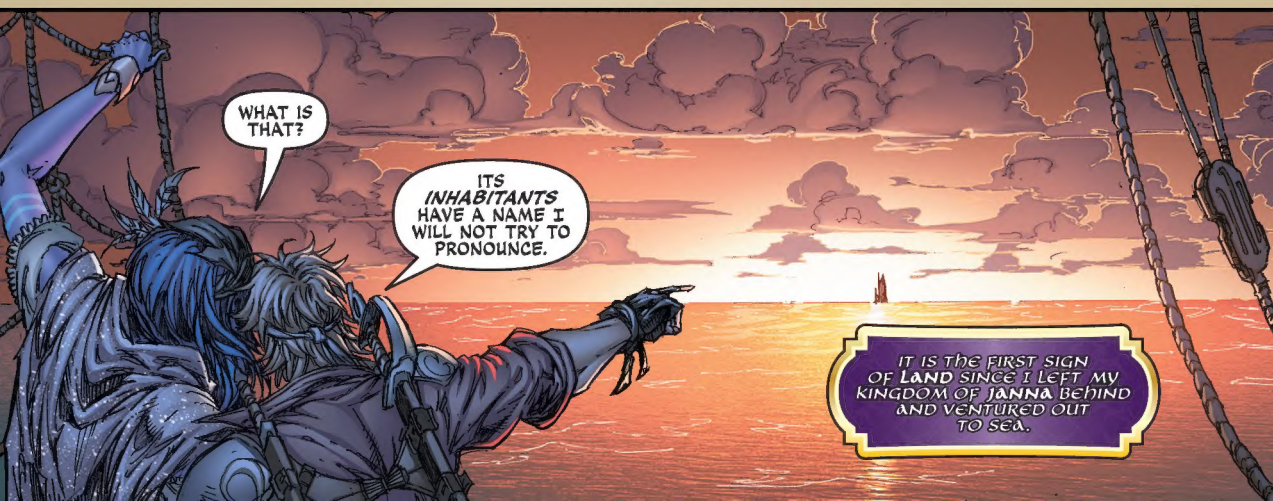
YOU ARE
MISTAKEN, ARA. I
HAVE A PATH. A STEADY
COURSE, THOUGH IT GOES
IN A *CIRCLE* RATHER
THAN A STRAIGHT
LINE.

NOT
THAT I AM
COMPLAINING.



A PATH TO
WHERE?

WELL,
FOR STARTERS--
THERE.



WHAT IS
THAT?

IT'S
INHABITANTS
HAVE A NAME I
WILL NOT TRY TO
PRONOUNCE.

IT IS THE FIRST SIGN
OF LAND SINCE I LEFT MY
KINGDOM OF JARNA BEHIND
AND VENTURED OUT
TO SEA.



TO US,
IT IS SIMPLY
CALLED *BLACK*
ROCK.



OKAY, *BOYS*--
YOU KNOW HOW
THIS WORKS. I NEED TWO
MORE MEN TO HELP WITH
THE EXCHANGE. VOLUNTEERS
GET BONUS PAY WHEN WE
REACH OUR NEXT
PORT.



I'LL GO,
CAPTAIN.



THAT'S THE
WAY, *HUNTA*.
LET YOUR GREED
OVERPOWER
YOUR FEAR.



I HOLD
NEITHER
GREED NOR
FEAR, BUT I
WILL JOIN
YOU.

I THOUGHT
YOU MIGHT. YOU'VE
GOT A *CURIOSITY*
ABOUT YOU, *ARA*.
LIKE ME.



WE
CLIMB?

YOU FLATTER
ME. NO MAN COULD
CLIMB THAT.

THEN
HOW?

MORTOG?

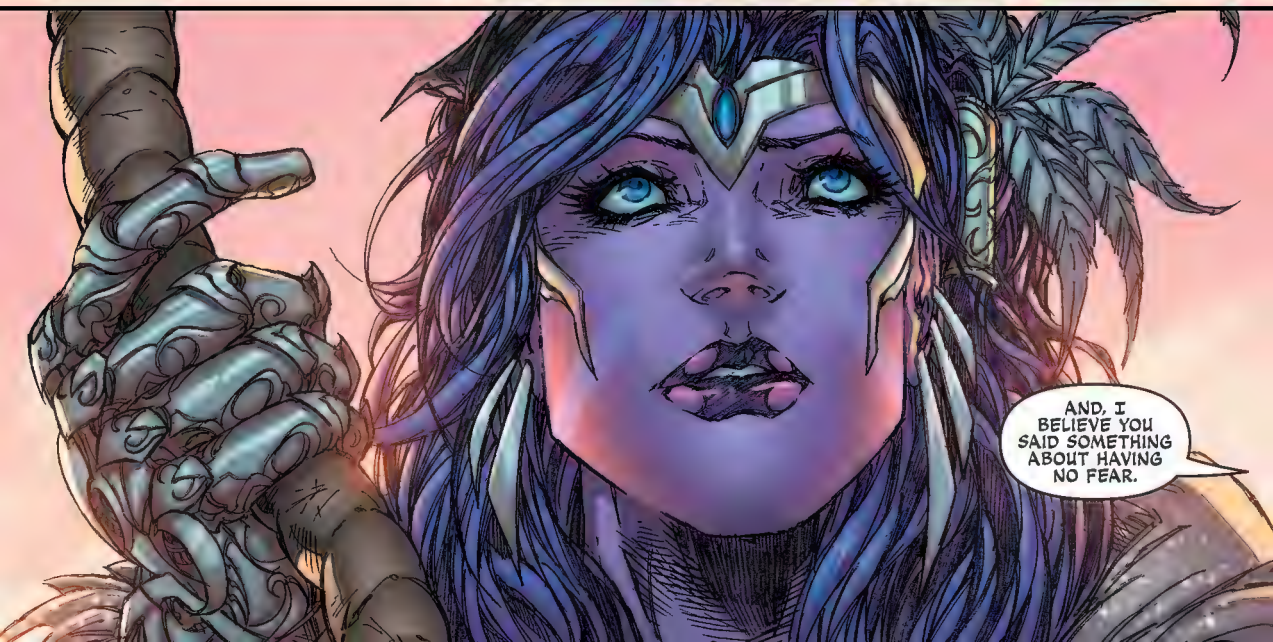


**BB
BHHH
HRRR
RMM
MM!**



AND YOU
TRUST WHAT'S
ON THE OTHER
END OF THESE
ROPES?

I TRUST
NOTHING IN
THIS WORLD. BUT
IT IS THE ONLY
WAY.



AND, I
BELIEVE YOU
SAID SOMETHING
ABOUT HAVING
NO FEAR.

T H C X T H C X T H C X T H C X

THERE IS
A RHYTHM TO MY
ASCENT. THERE IS NO
WHEEL OR PULLEY
INVOLVED.

WHATEVER
IS PULLING US---
IT'S ALIVE.



—AND STRONG.



WHAT ARE THEY?

NASTY CREATURES. TYKTHAS.

ODD NAME. WHY DO YOU CALL THEM THAT?



TYKTYKTYK-
TYKTYKHAS--YOU HAVE
BEEN AWAY--TYKTYKHAS--
TOO LONG--TYKTYK-
TYKHAS, BORO.

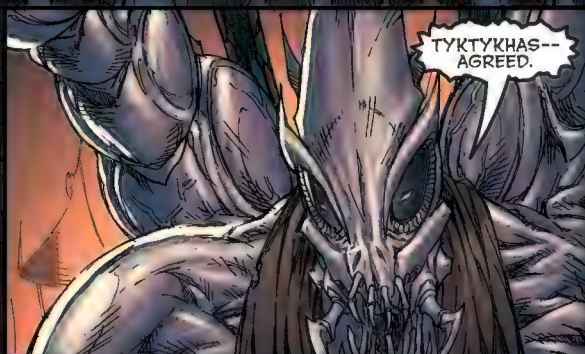
IT'S NICE
TO KNOW THAT I
AM MISSED.



TYKTYK-
TYKHAS-- WHAT
IS THIS?--TYKHAS--
SOME NEW *DELICACY*
FOR US TO-- TYK-
TYKTYKHAS--
TRY?

AFRAID NOT,
MY LORD. *SHE* IS
WITH US, BUT BE ASSURED,
YOUR STOMACHS WILL BE
HEARTILY FILLED BY
WHAT WE HAVE TO
OFFER.

AGREED?



TYKTYKHAS--
AGREED.



AND
WHAT DO
WE GET IN
RETURN,
BORO?

WE GET
RICH.

AS SOON AS
YOU PUT THOSE
BEAUTIFUL *MUSCLES*
OF YOURS TO
WORK.



NICE,
NO?

I AM
NOT ONE TO
SWOON OVER
JEWELS.

THIS IS NO
GEM. IT'S AN **ENERGY**
SOURCE. I'VE SEEN IT
POWER THINGS-- LIGHTS,
WEAPONS, EVEN VESSELS,
SHIPS, AND CARRIAGES.
AMAZING SIGHT TO
BEHOLD.



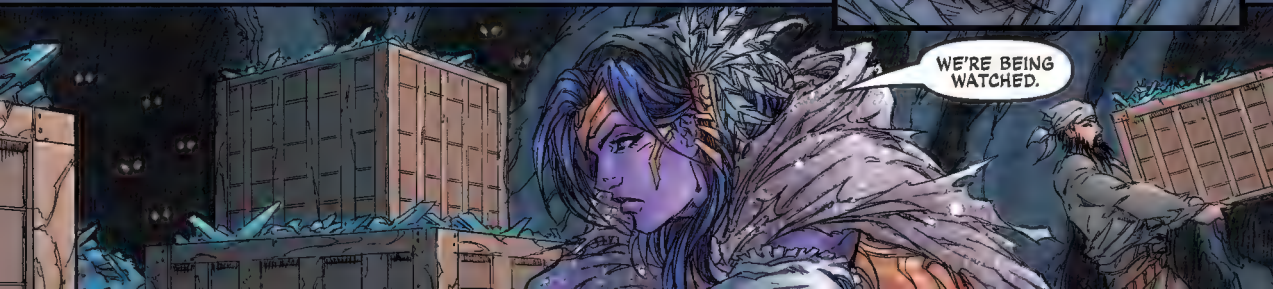
DOESN'T
LOOK SO
SPECIAL.

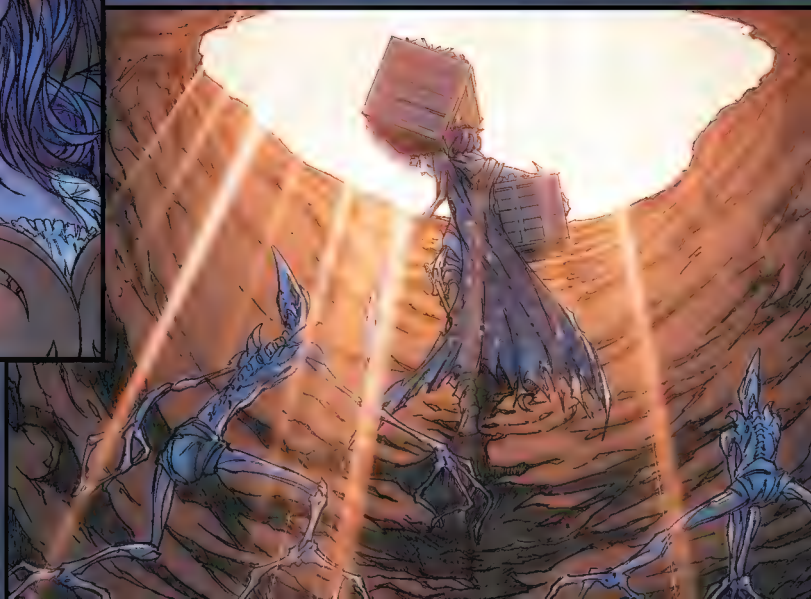
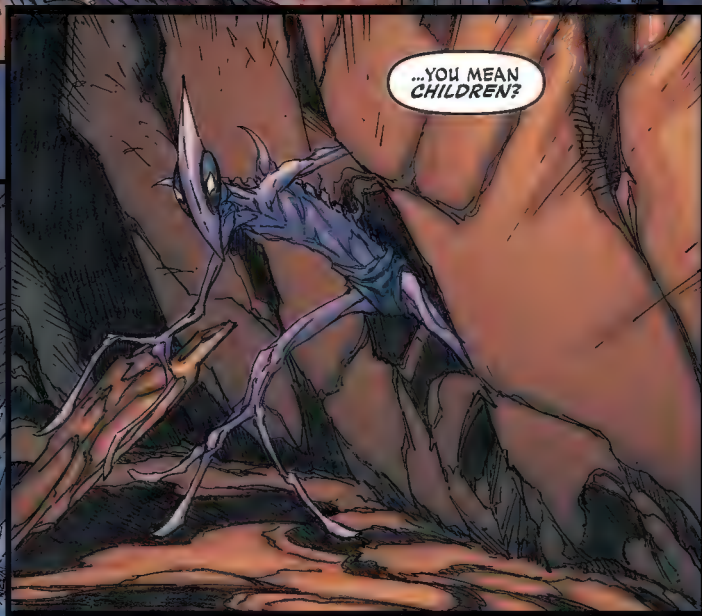
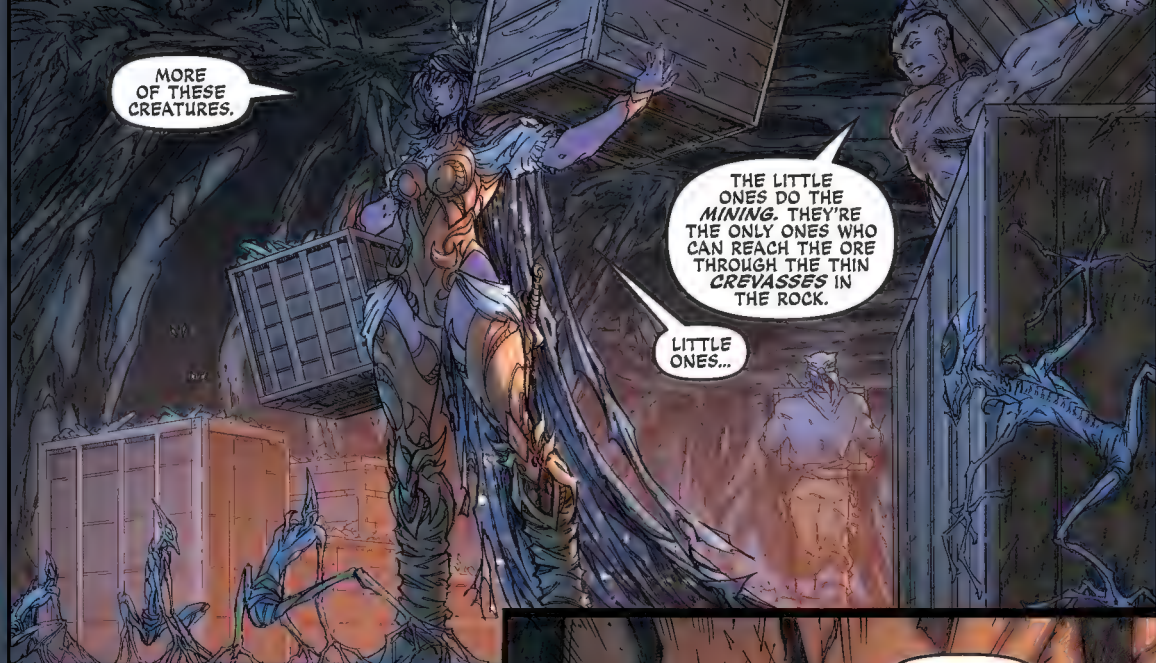


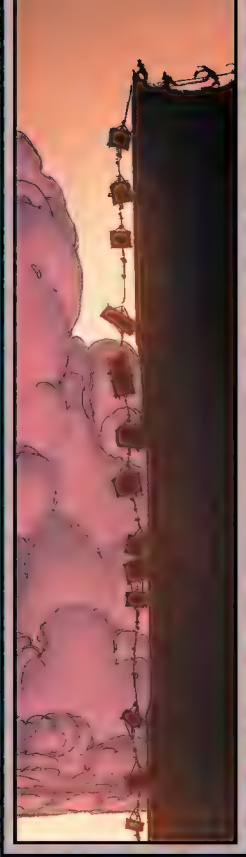
BUT...
IF YOU SAY IT'S
VALUABLE...



WE'RE BEING
WATCHED.



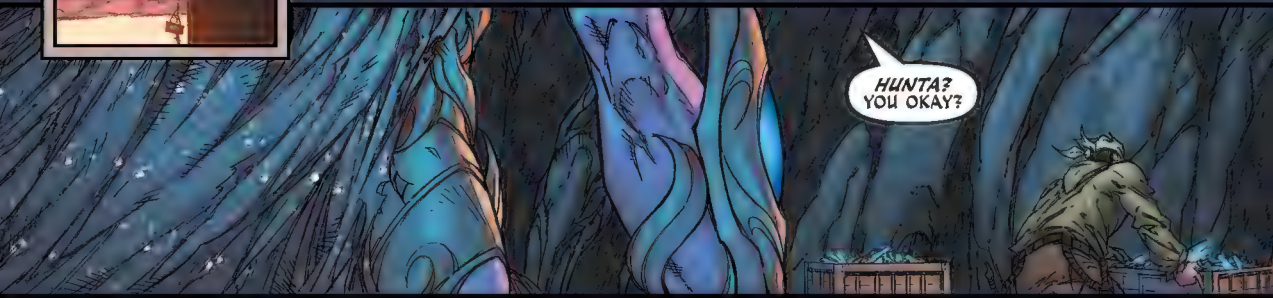




HOW ARE WE
LOOKING?

TWO
MORE CRATES
TO GO.

EXCELLENT.
WE CAN BE
OFF BEFORE
SUNDOWN.



HUNTA?
YOU OKAY?



SURE.
YES. TIRED
IS ALL.

I CAN
GET THE
LAST ONES.
WHY DON'T
YOU HEAD
BACK?



I CAN
DO MY
PART.

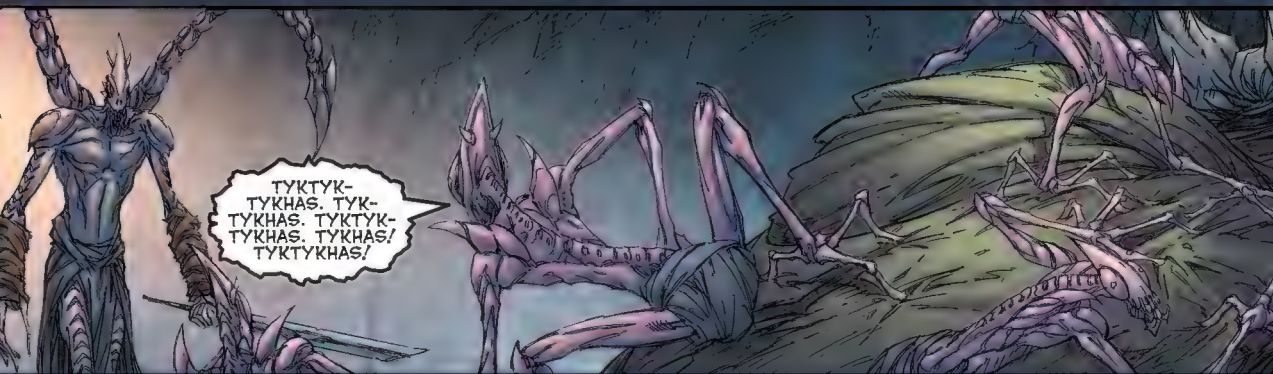
IF YOU
INSIST.



AAAAHHH!



GET
THEM OFF
ME!



TYKTYK-
TYKHAS. TYK-
TYKHAS. TYKTYK-
TYKHAS. TYKHAS/
TYKTYKHAS!



TYKTYKTHAS!

WHATEVER AGREEMENT
BORO HAD WITH THESE
CREATURES, IT LOOKS LIKE
THEY ARE BREAKING IT.





SO BE IT.

HUNTA!
MOVE!

DROP DEAD,
YOU LITTLE SCURVY
BASTARDS!

NEXT TIME,
I'LL GUT THE
LOT OF YA!

GLAD
TO HEAR
YOU GOT SOME
FIGHT LEFT
IN YOU--



--BECAUSE
THIS ISN'T
OVER!

ARA,
STOP!



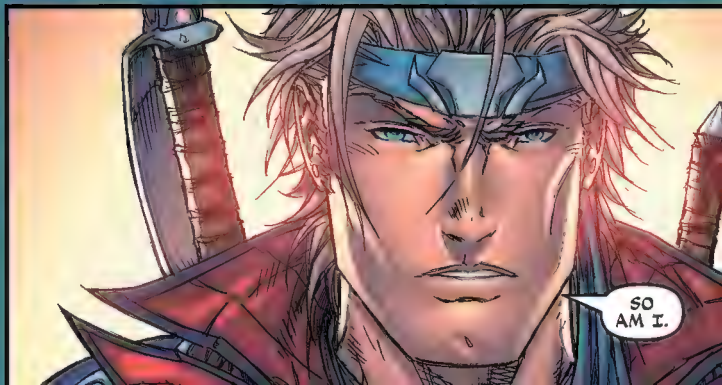
BORO, THIS
KING *CANNOT*
BE TRUSTED. HIS...
THINGS TRIED TO
KILL US.



MY INSTINCT
TELLS ME THE
MISTRUST LIES
ELSEWHERE.



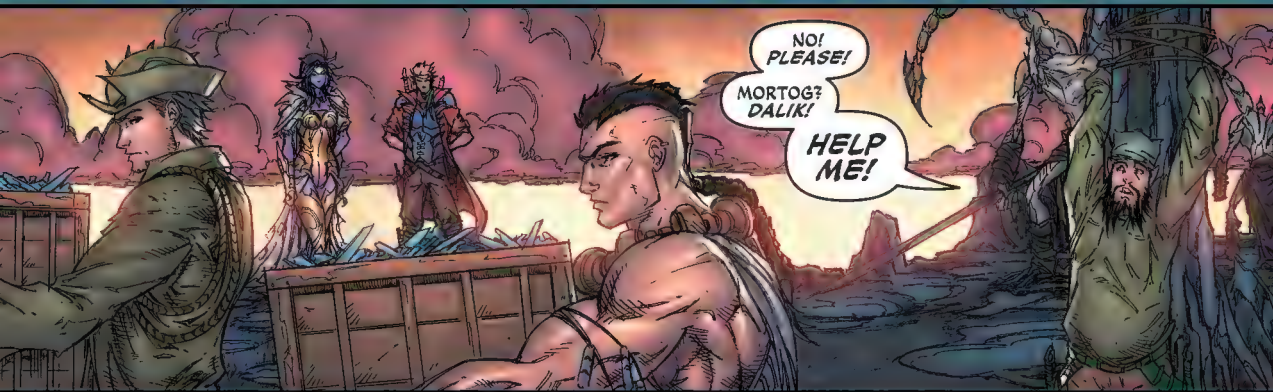
I ONLY
TOOK A FEW,
CAPTAIN. I'M...
I'M SORRY.



SO
AM I.



BORO?!



**NO!
PLEASE!
MORTOG?
DALIK!**

**HELP
ME!**



**YOU
REALLY
MEAN TO
LEAVE
HIM?**

**I DO
INDEED,
ARA.**

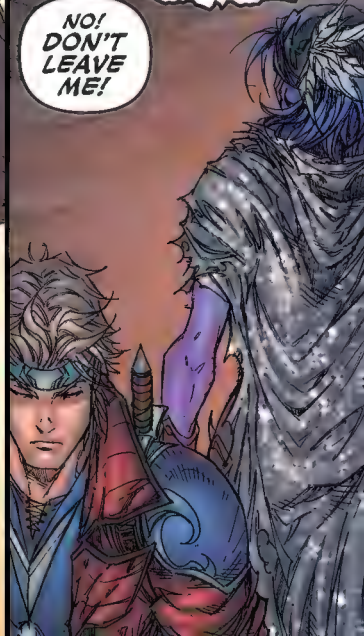
**HUNTA
KNEW THE
RULES HERE.
HE BROKE
THEM.**

**EITHER
HE PAYS
FOR IT, OR
WE ALL
DO.**



**TYK-
TYKHAS. TYKTYK-
TYKHAS.**

**NO!
DON'T
LEAVE
ME!**



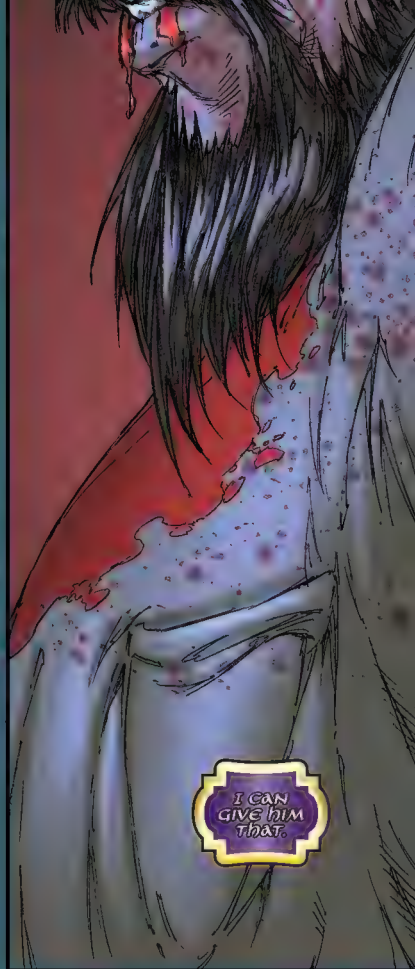


I CAN'T
SAVE HIM.

his FATE
WAS SEALED THE
MOMENT HE STOLE
FROM THESE
CREATURES.



BUT I CAN
MAKE SURE
HE DOESN'T
SUFFER.



I CAN
GIVE HIM
THAT.



TO BE
CONTINUED.



VOL. 2

#2

OF 5

COVER A

J. C. KRUL • V. KEN MARION
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"o u t o s e a"

VOLUME TWO - CHAPTER TWO OF FIVE

Written by J.T. KRUL • Pencils by V KEN MARION
Digital Inks by MARK ROSLAN • Colors by JUAN FERNANDEZ
Letters by JOSH REED

PREVIOUSLY

Ara's voyage across the Jiral Sea continued aboard Bor's ship as they sought to trade goods for the pieces of Zen's map. They had a rough start, but after a long and hard day, they finally found the pieces they needed. However, the pieces were not what they expected. They were... (text is blurry)

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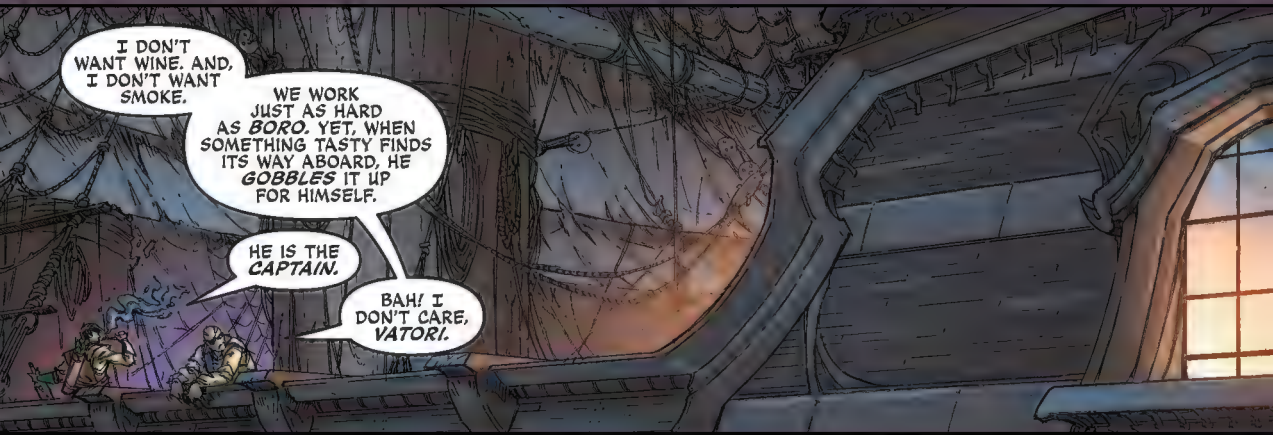
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COME ON, HORIS--
ENJOY A SWIG.
IT'LL CALM YOUR
AGITATION.



I DON'T
WANT WINE. AND,
I DON'T WANT
SMOKE.

WE WORK
JUST AS HARD
AS BORO. YET, WHEN
SOMETHING TASTY FINDS
ITS WAY ABOARD, HE
GOBBLES IT UP
FOR HIMSELF.

HE IS THE
CAPTAIN.

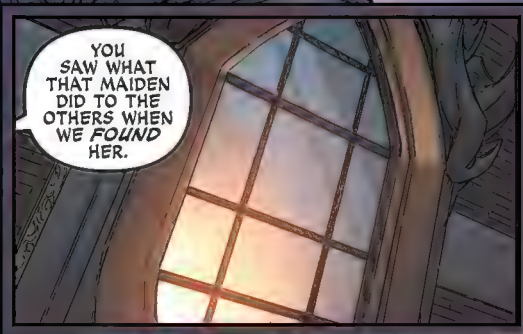
BAH! I
DON'T CARE,
VATORI.



WE BEEN
AT SEA JUST AS
LONG. WE GOT THE
SAME URGES. THE SAME
ITCHES THAT NEED
SCRATCHING.



YOU SHOULD BE
CAREFUL WHAT YOU
WISH FOR, HORIS.

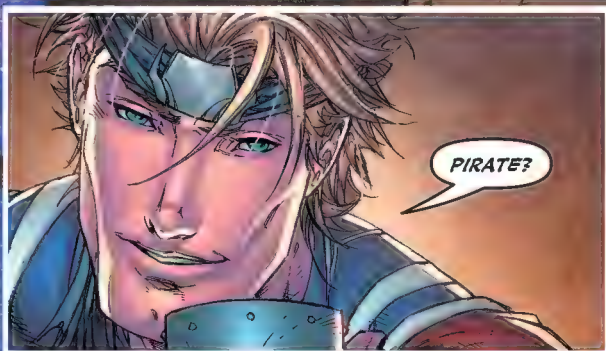


YOU
SAW WHAT
THAT MAIDEN
DID TO THE
OTHERS WHEN
WE FOUND
HER.



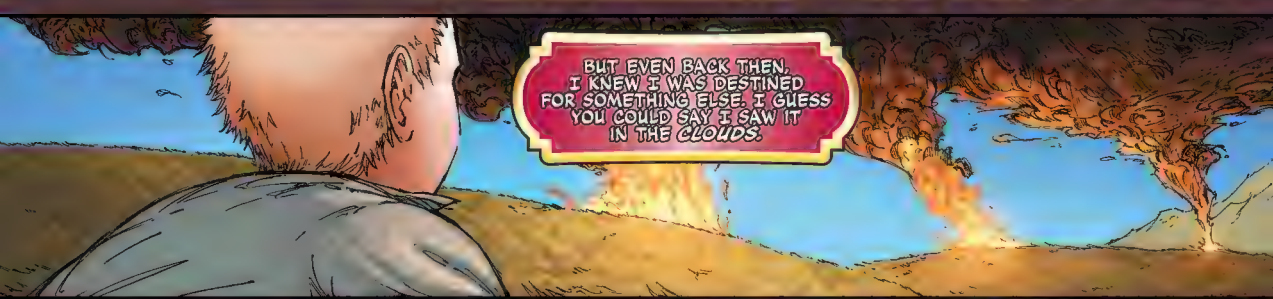
"ARA
SCRATCHES YOU--
THERE MIGHT NOT
BE NOTHING LEFT
AFTERWARD."

AND I SIMPLY
DROPPED THE
LOT ON HIM. ALL
FIVE BARRELS.





YOU MIGHT FIND IT
HARD TO BELIEVE GIVEN MY
OBVIOUS CHARM AND WORLDLY
MANNER, BUT IN MY YOUTH I
WAS JUST A FARM BOY.



BUT EVEN BACK THEN,
I KNEW I WAS DESTINED
FOR SOMETHING ELSE. I GUESS
YOU COULD SAY I SAW IT
IN THE CLOUDS.



LIKE A CALLING.



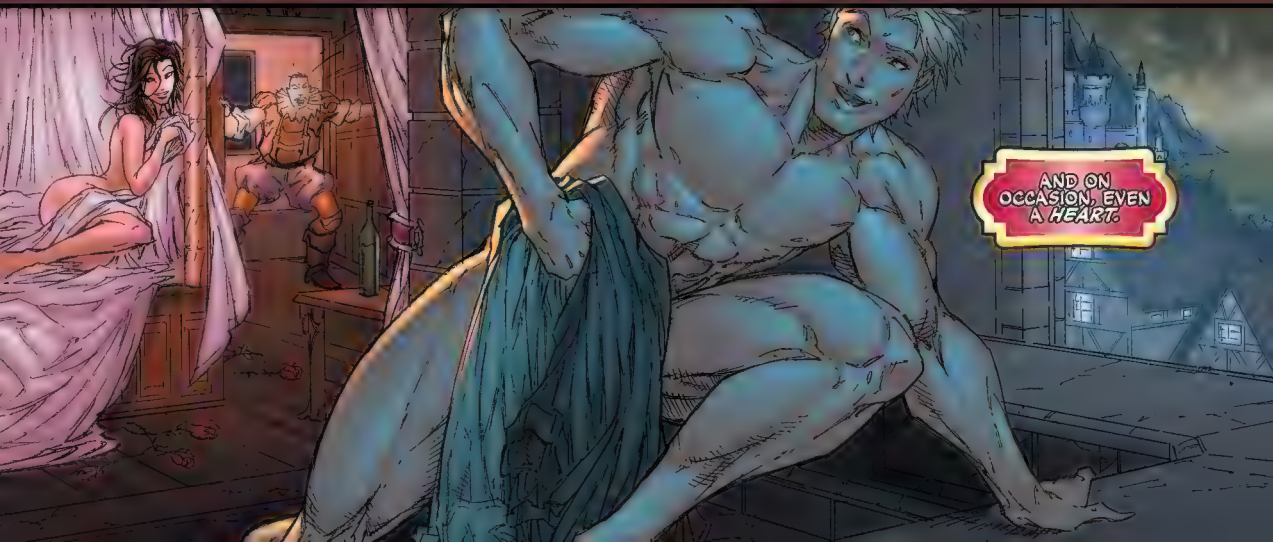
AS MUCH AS
IT HURT, I KNEW
I COULDN'T STAY
WITH MY FAMILY
FOREVER.

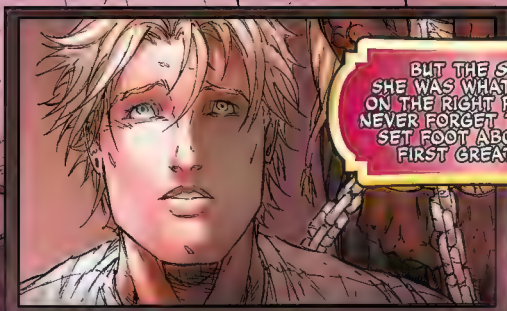
THEIR LIVES
HAD THEIR
PATHS.



AND I
HAD MINE.

ONE I
HAD TO TAKE
ALONE.



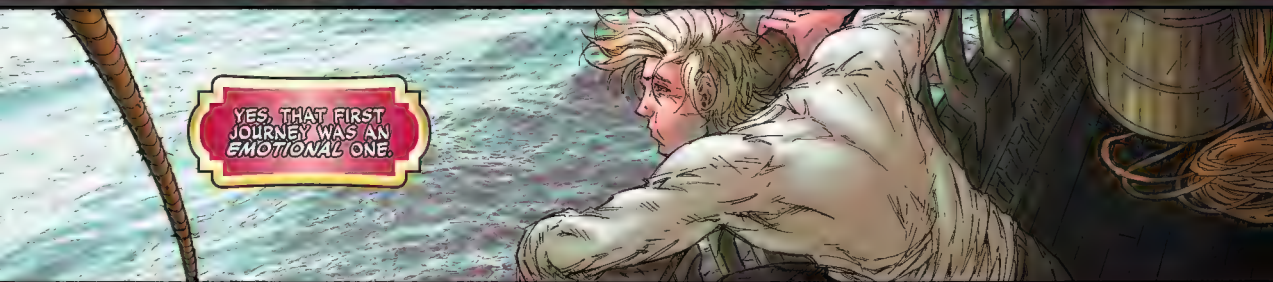


BUT THE SEA--
SHE WAS WHAT SET ME
ON THE RIGHT PATH. I'LL
NEVER FORGET THE DAY I
SET FOOT ABOARD MY
FIRST GREAT SHIP.

IT WAS
APTLY NAMED *THE
DELIVERANCE*. AND
IT SURE PROVED TO
BE MINE.



YES. THAT FIRST
JOURNEY WAS AN
EMOTIONAL ONE.



THE CAPTAIN SAW
MY POTENTIAL RIGHT
AWAY, THOUGH.



GAVE ME
DUTIES FAR
ABOVE THE
OTHER MEN ON
HIS CREW.



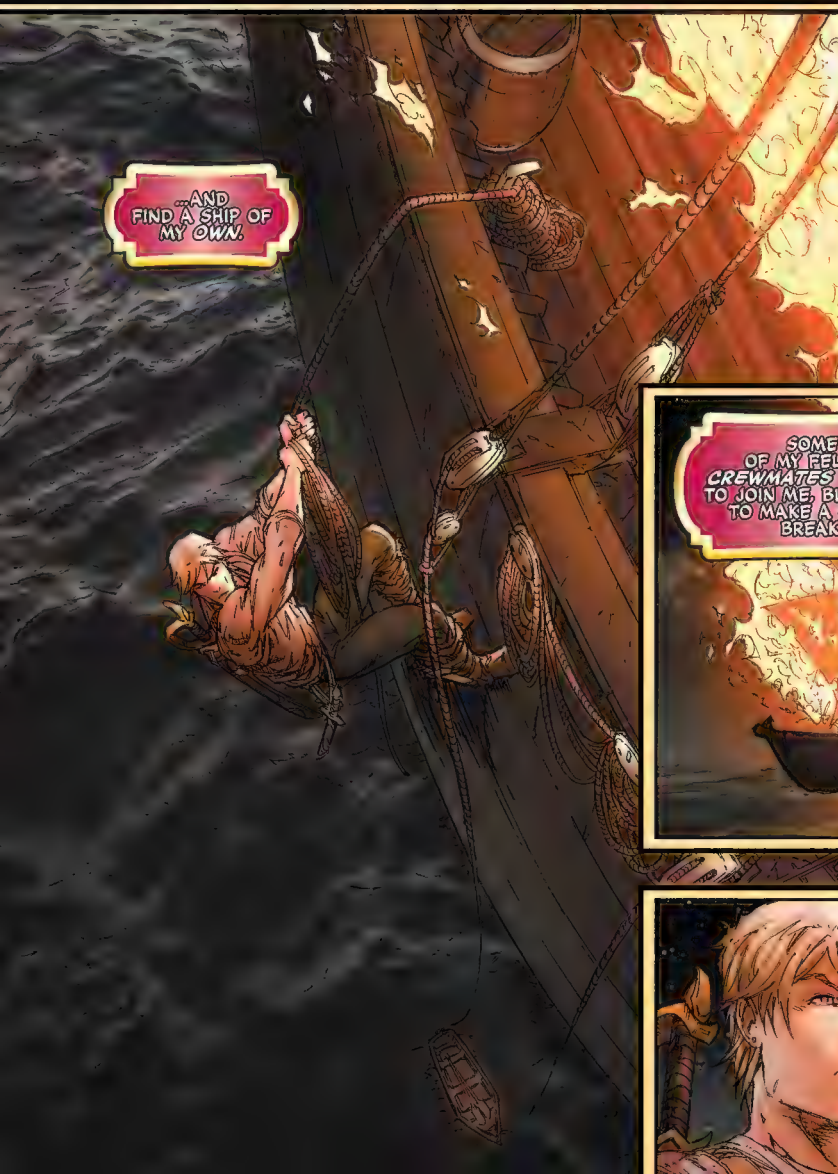
YEAH. HE REALLY
SINGLED ME OUT.
EMBRACED ME LIKE
HE MIGHT A SON,
IF HE HAD ONE.



AND
WHEN THE
CAPTAIN COULD
TEACH ME NO
MORE...



...I KNEW IT
WAS TIME TO SAY MY
FAREWELLS...



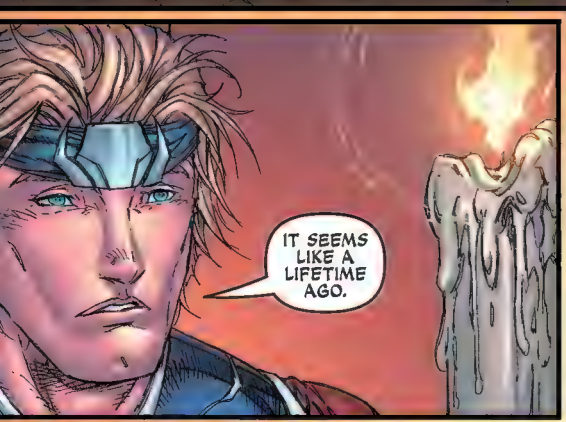
AND
FIND A SHIP OF
MY OWN.



SOME
OF MY FELLOW
CREWMATES WANTED
TO JOIN ME, BUT I HAD
TO MAKE A CLEAN
BREAK.



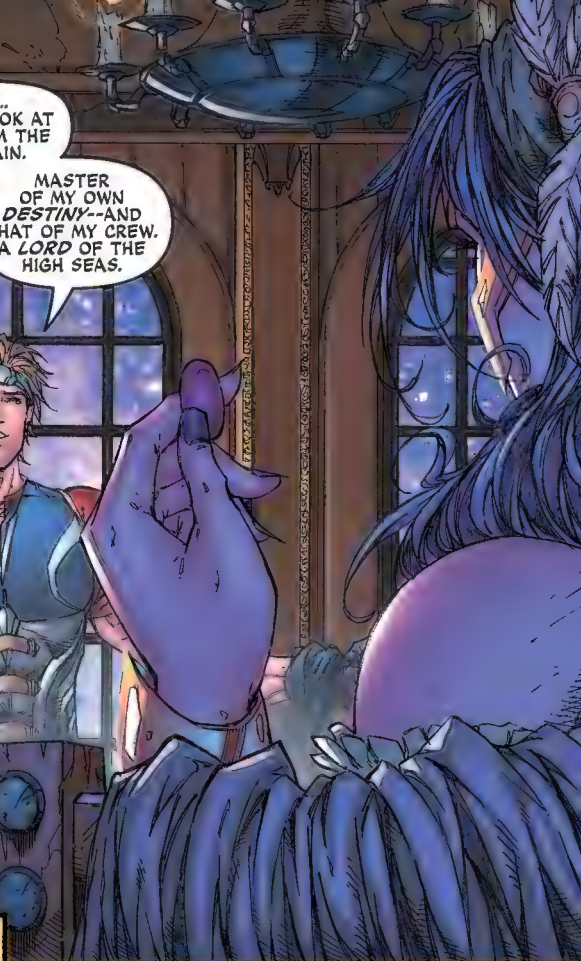
CHART
A NEW
COURSE.



IT SEEMS
LIKE A
LIFETIME
AGO.

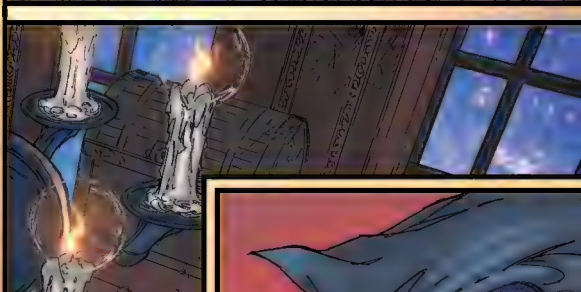
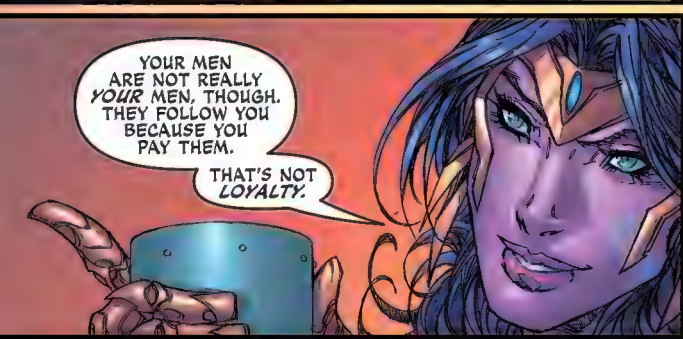
BUT...
NOW? LOOK AT
ME. I AM THE
CAPTAIN.

MASTER OF MY OWN
DESTINY--AND
THAT OF MY CREW.
A LORD OF THE
HIGH SEAS.



YOUR MEN
ARE NOT REALLY
YOUR MEN, THOUGH.
THEY FOLLOW YOU
BECAUSE YOU
PAY THEM.

THAT'S NOT
LOYALTY.



LOYALTY?
I ASSUME YOU
REALLY REFER TO
ROYALTY?

BAH! BLOOD
MEANS NOTHING.
UNLESS IT IS YOUR OWN
SPILLING ONTO THE
GROUND.

PEOPLE DO NOT
FOLLOW OTHERS BECAUSE
OF WHOM THEY MANAGED TO
COERCE IN THE BEDROOM.
WHO BEGAT WHO.

FOOD. SHELTER.
OPPORTUNITY. YOU
PROVIDE THAT--AND EVEN A
THIEF CAN BE TREATED
LIKE A KING.

OR A
QUEEN.





KINGDOM OF JANNA.

THEN.

MOTHER!
LOOK!

CAREFUL,
ARA. ANY CLOSER
AND I FEAR YOU WILL
BECOME PART OF
THE ACT.



OUR FAIR
KINGDOM CAN
DO WITHOUT A
SCORCHED
PRINCESS.

YES,
MOTHER.



AND WITH
NEARLY ALL HIS
SOLDIERS CAST DOWN
ON THE BATTLEFIELD, THE
GREAT WARWYK FACED
THE ATTACKING
HORDE ALONE.

BUT DID HE
RETREAT?

Noooo!



INDEED NOT.
OUR BELOVED
KING RUSHED INTO
CERTAIN DEATH, THINKING
ONLY OF PROTECTING
HIS FAMILY...AND OUR
KINGDOM.

CUT.
SLASH! CUT.
SLASH! ONE-BY-
ONE, WARWYK FOUGHT
THEM OFF AND WON
THE DAY--FOR
JANNA!



DID
GRANDFATHER
REALLY FIGHT
THEM ALL
ALONE?



THESE
TALES SEEM
TO GET **BOLDER**
BY THE YEAR. ALONE?
I DOUBT IT, ARA. MY
FATHER WAS A GREAT
KING--BUT EVEN
HE MUST HAVE
NEEDED HELP.

SPOKEN
LIKE A GREAT
KING IN HIS OWN
RIGHT, MY DEAR
KENAQ.



MY
QUEEN! MY
QUEEN!

BLESSED,
LUNA!



THE PEOPLE LOVE YOUR MOTHER, ARA. NOT THAT IT COMES AS ANY BIG SURPRISE TO US, RIGHT?

RIGHT.



YOU CAN SEE THE HOPE SHE BRINGS THEM. THE HOPE FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE. THE HOPE FOR A BETTER LIFE FOR THEIR CHILDREN.

IT'S MORE THAN EVEN I CAN OFFER THEM.



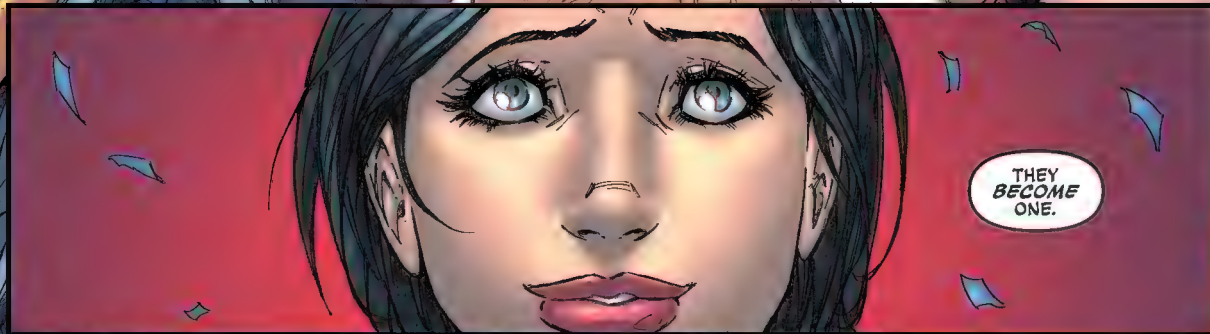
PERHAPS, IT IS BECAUSE SHE WAS ONCE JUST A REGULAR PERSON LIKE THEM.

SHE WASN'T BORN A QUEEN?

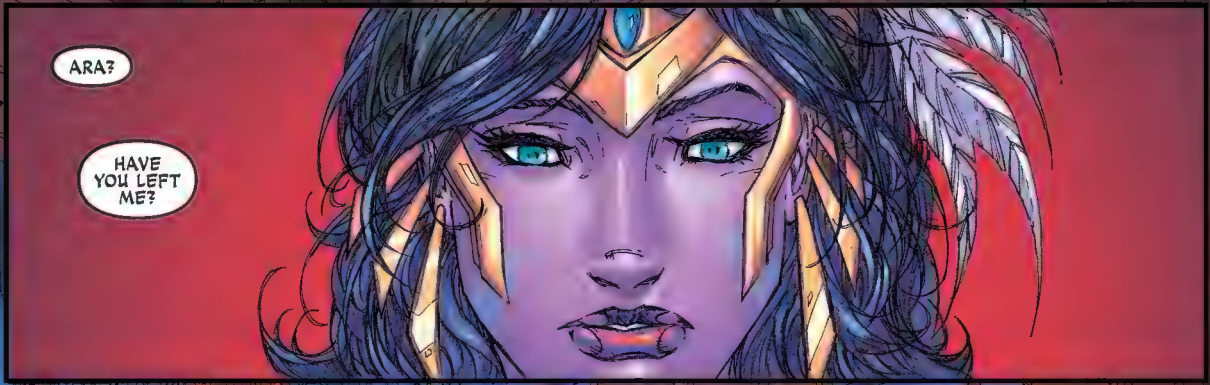


NOT A DROP OF ROYAL BLOOD. NOT THAT IT MATTERED.

BESIDES-- NOBODY IS BORN A QUEEN, MY DEAR.



THEY BECOME ONE.



ARA?

HAVE
YOU LEFT
ME?



A THIEF
COULD BE A
KING. HUH? BUT, I
THOUGHT YOU SAID
YOU WEREN'T A
THIEF?

I WAS
MERELY USING
THAT AS AN
EXAMPLE.



I MUST SAY--
FOR SOMEONE WHOM
I SAVED FROM CERTAIN
DEATH LOST AT SEA, YOUR
INSULTS TO MY STATION
IN LIFE ARE RATHER
CONSISTENT.



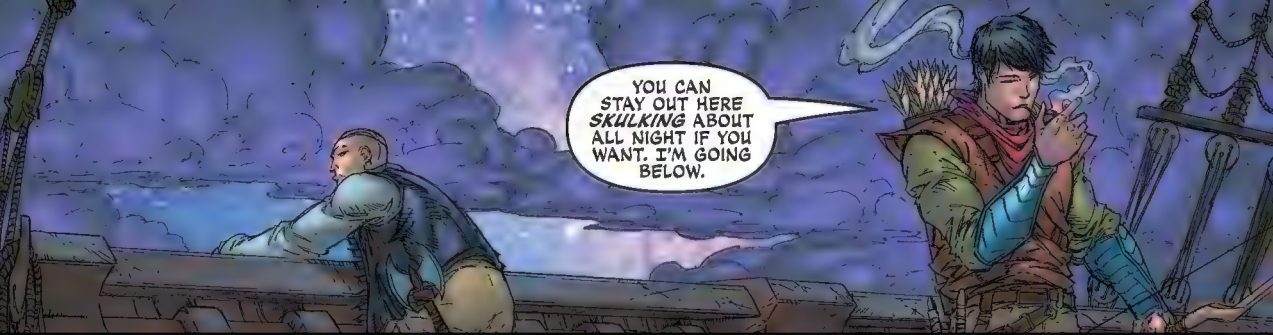
MY
APOLOGIES,
DEAR, SWEET
CAPTAIN
BORO.

BUT DO
I LOOK LIKE
I NEED A MAN
TO RESCUE
ME?



NOT
AT ALL.

BUT--YOU
NEVER KNOW.
YOU MIGHT
ENJOY IT.



YOU CAN
STAY OUT HERE
SKULKING ABOUT
ALL NIGHT IF YOU
WANT. I'M GOING
BELOW.



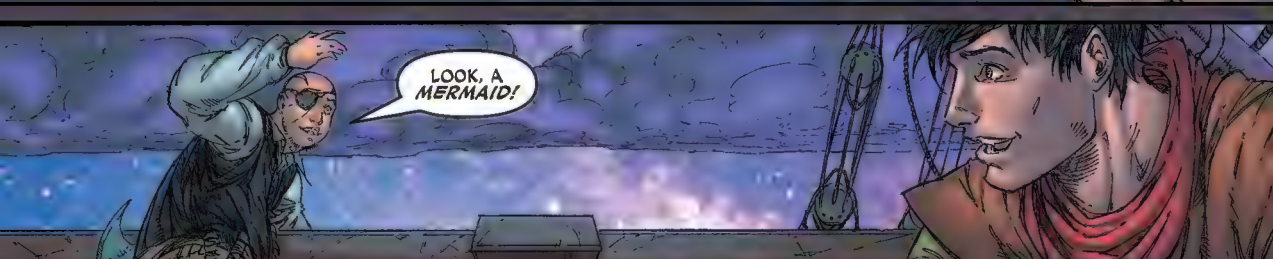
HUH?



VATORI?
DO YOU SEE
THAT?



I CANNOT
BELIEVE MY
EYES!



LOOK, A
MERMAID!

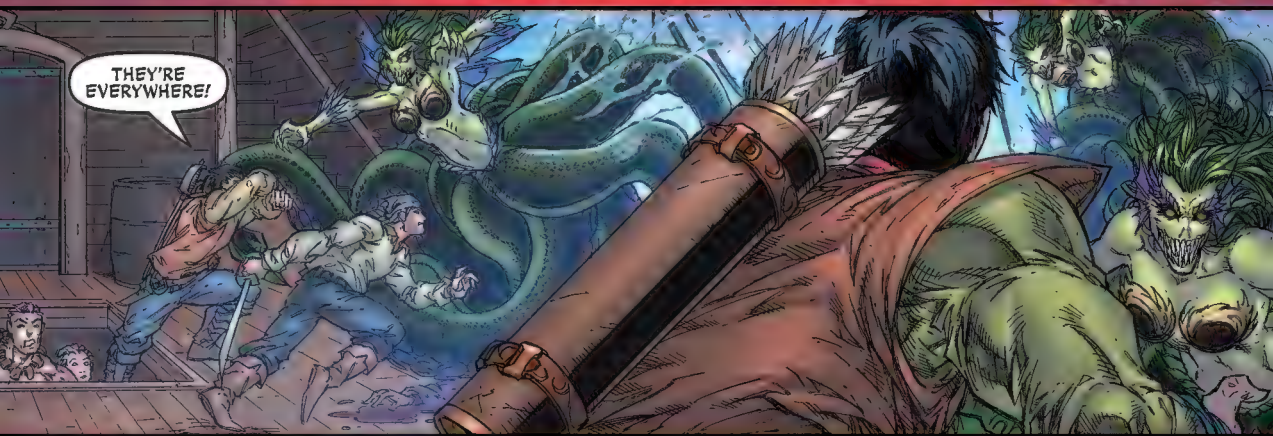


SHE IS
SO...BEYOND
ANYTHING IN
THE TALES
TOLD...

...AND
SH-SHE IS
COMING TO
M-ME!

SKRREEEE!!!







STAND
ASIDE,
VATORI.

WHAT
ARE THESE
CREATURES?

MYTHS OF
CHILDHOOD CALL THEM
MERMAIDS. BEAUTIFUL
ENCHANTRESSES OF
THE SEAS.

THEREIN
LIES THE
MYTH.

BEAUTIFUL?

SHLKT

THEY
ARE THE
UNDA.

THE WATER
WARPS THEIR
BEASTLY FORM.
MAKES THEM APPEAR
DIVINE. UNTIL IT IS
TOO LATE.



LIVING
IN THE DARKNESS
BELOW THE SURFACE,
THEY ARE DRAWN TO
SHINY OBJECTS.

THE GLOW
OF A LANTERN.
THE FLAME OF
A CANDLE, THE
GLEAM OF A
JEWEL.



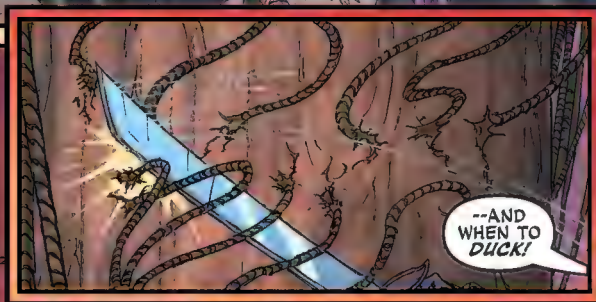
YOU SHALL...
TAKE **NOTHING**
FROM ME...VILE
CREATURE.



YOU SHALL
TAKE NOTHING
EVER AGAIN!

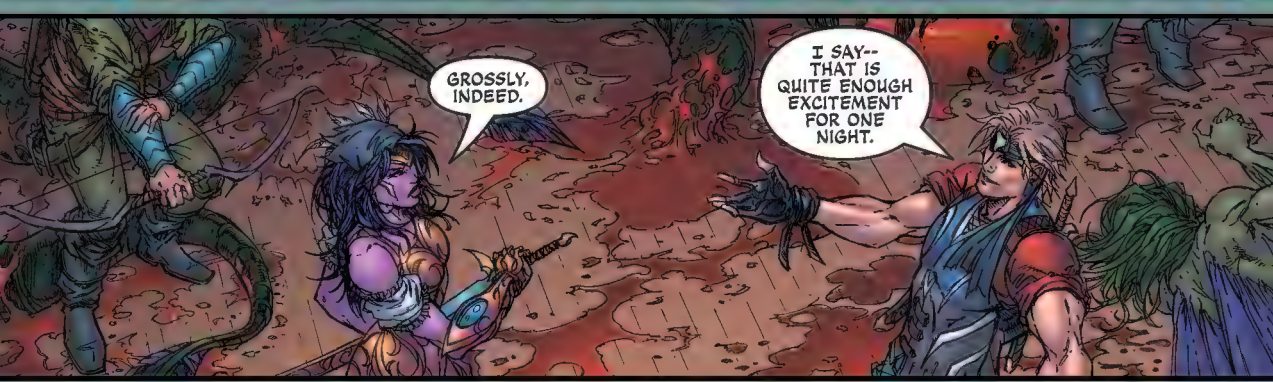
EEESSHHHHKK!





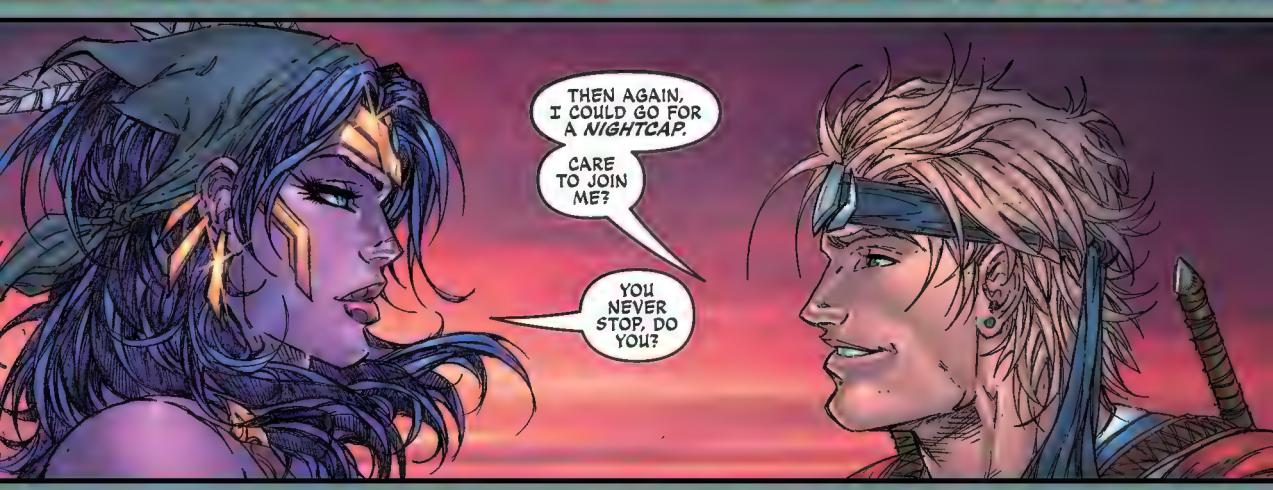


I NEVER SEEN SUCH A THING! OBVIOUSLY THE STORIES OF THE MERMAID'S BEAUTY ARE GROSSLY OVERSTATED.



GROSSLY, INDEED.

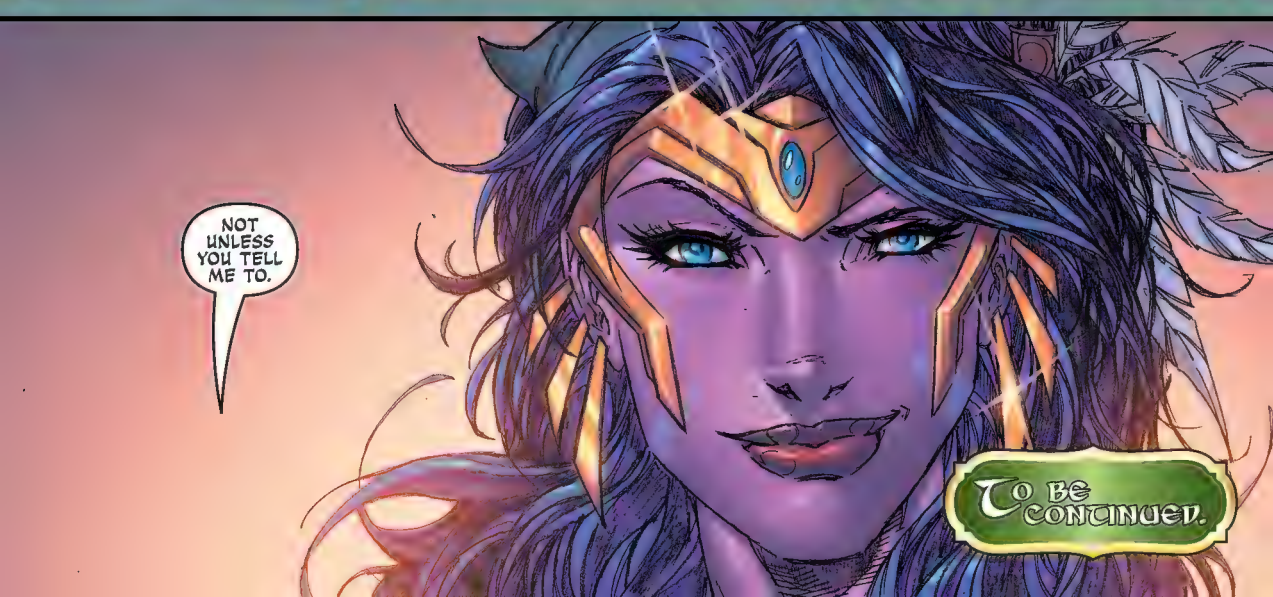
I SAY-- THAT IS QUITE ENOUGH EXCITEMENT FOR ONE NIGHT.



THEN AGAIN, I COULD GO FOR A NIGHTCAP.

CARE TO JOIN ME?

YOU NEVER STOP, DO YOU?



NOT UNLESS YOU TELL ME TO.

TO BE CONTINUED.

Q'irni





L. C. KRUL • V. KEN MARION
WES HARTMAN • JOSH REED

VOL. 2

#3

OF 5

COVER B

Qirni





Direct Edition
by V KEN MARION
& JUAN FERNANDEZ



Direct Edition
JONATHAN MARKS



Direct Edition
JONATHAN MARKS



"the gears of the world"

JIRNI

VOLUME TWO - CHAPTER THREE OF FIVE

Written by J.T. KRUL • Pencils by V KEN MARION

Character design by MARK ROSLAN • Colors by WES HARTMAN, STÉPHAN LEMINEUR,
PETER STEIGERWALD & FEDERICO BLEE

Letters by JOSH REED

PREVIOUSLY:

Boro revealed--and greatly embellished--his rise to captain of his own vessel, and master of his own destiny. However, said fate would chart their course through a deadly patch of sea infested with deadly mermaids, and the ship's crew along with the recently dead (but not dead).

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I ALWAYS KNEW MY MOTHER WAS SPECIAL, BUT NEVER REALIZED IT WAS FOR BEING MORE THAN SIMPLY THE QUEEN OF JONNA...



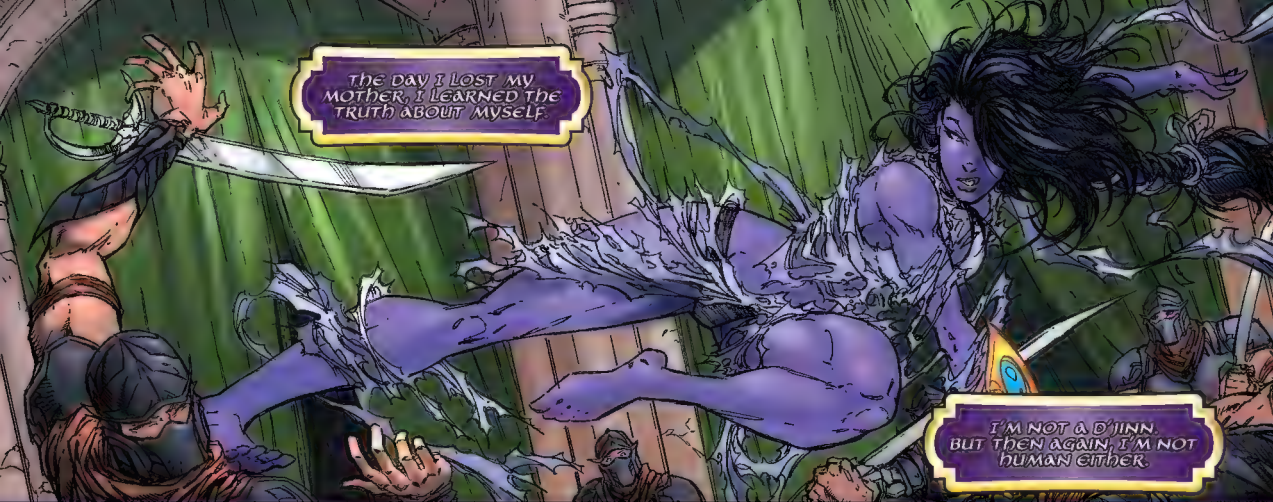
SHE WAS ALSO A D'JINN.

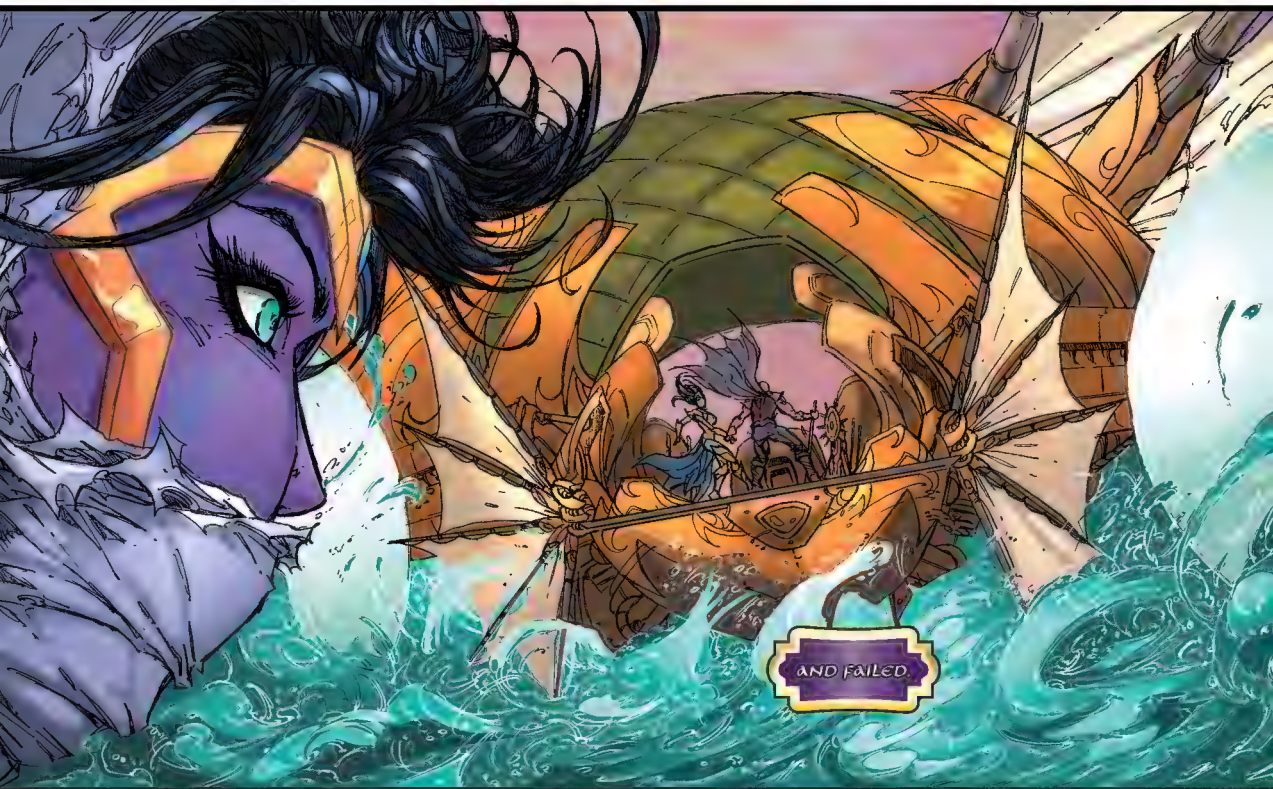
A UNIQUE SPIRIT WITH INCREDIBLE POWER.

BUT WITH THAT POWER CAME A PRICE.

SHE WAS A PRISONER TO HER VESSEL.

AND ONCE THE WIZARD TORINTHAL TOOK CONTROL OF HER VESSEL, HE TOOK CONTROL OF HER.







BUT I
HAVEN'T
GIVEN
UP.

SOMETIMES I
FORGET THAT I AM
STILL JUST A GIRL. AT
LEAST, I WAS.

I HONESTLY
DON'T KNOW
WHAT I AM IN
THIS WORLD.



A WOMAN?



A WARRIOR?

MY ONLY
SOLACE COMES IN THE
ONE CERTAINTY I CAN
RELY UPON.

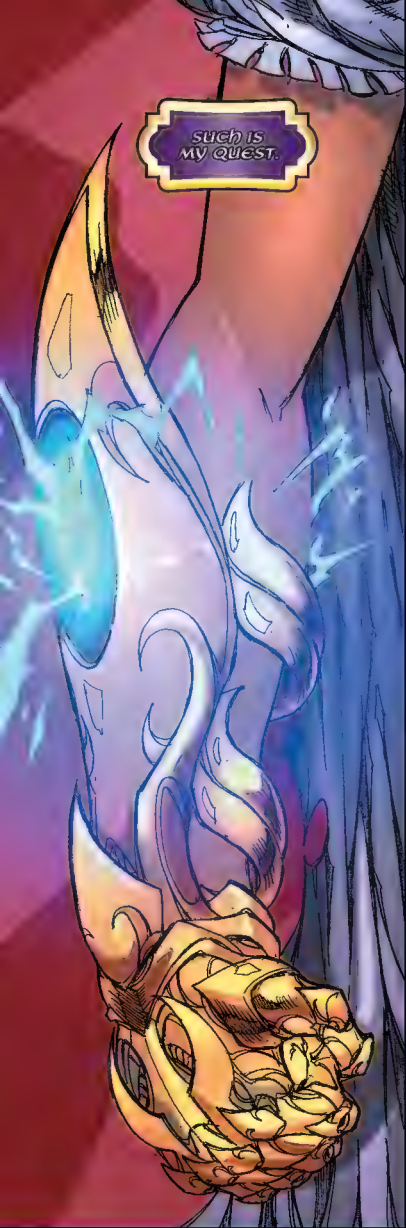


I REMAIN A
DAUGHTER IN
SEARCH OF HER
MOTHER.

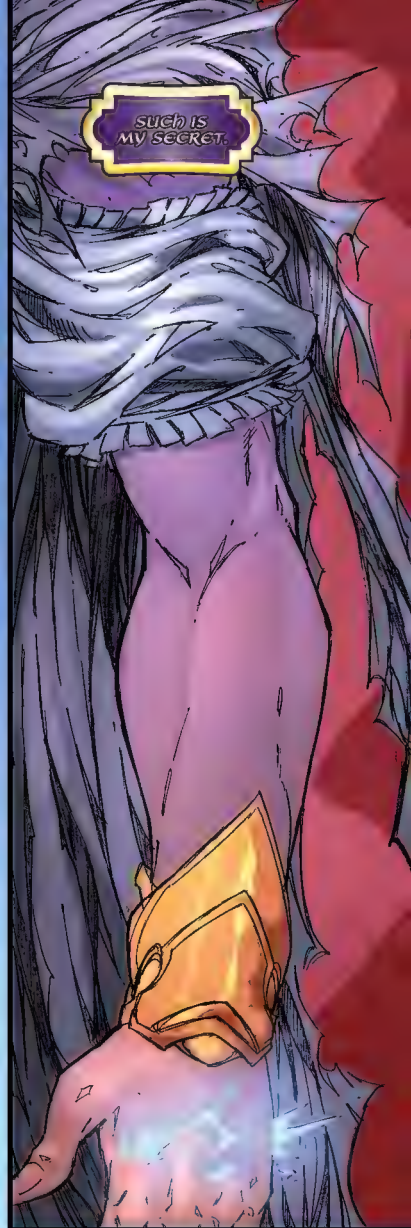
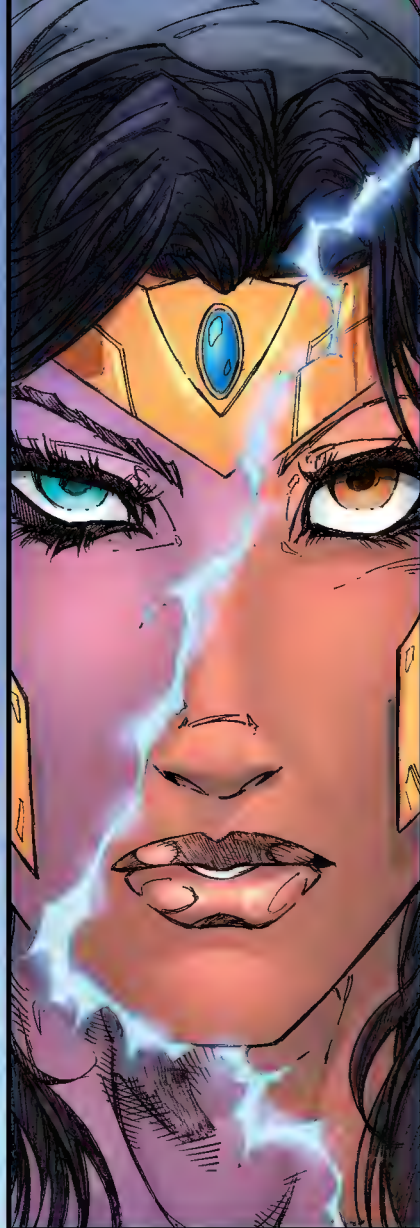


KNK
KNK

ARA.
YOU GOING TO
SLEEP THE DAY
AWAY?



such is
my quest.



such is
my secret.



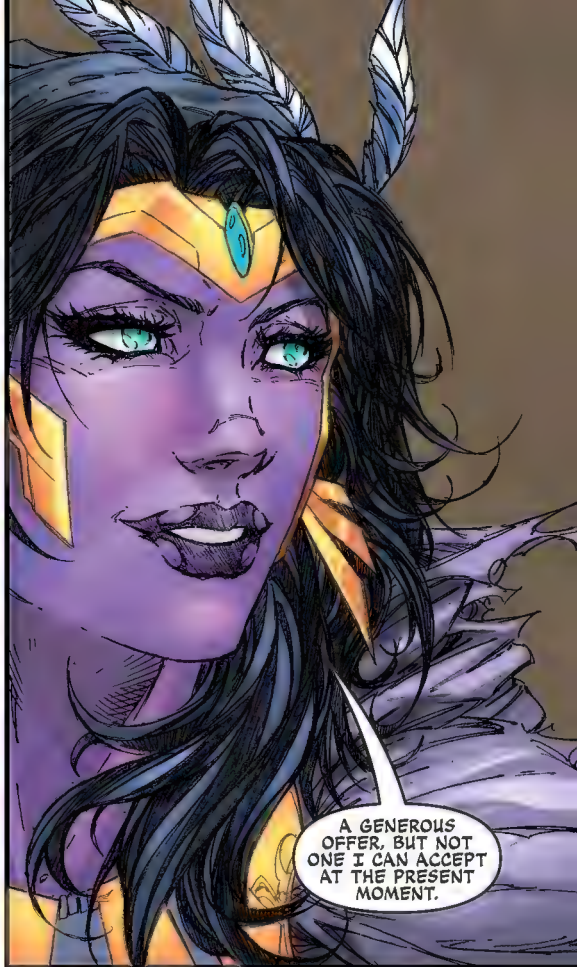
SORRY TO
DISTURB, BUT
WE HAVE A BIG
DAY AHEAD
OF US.



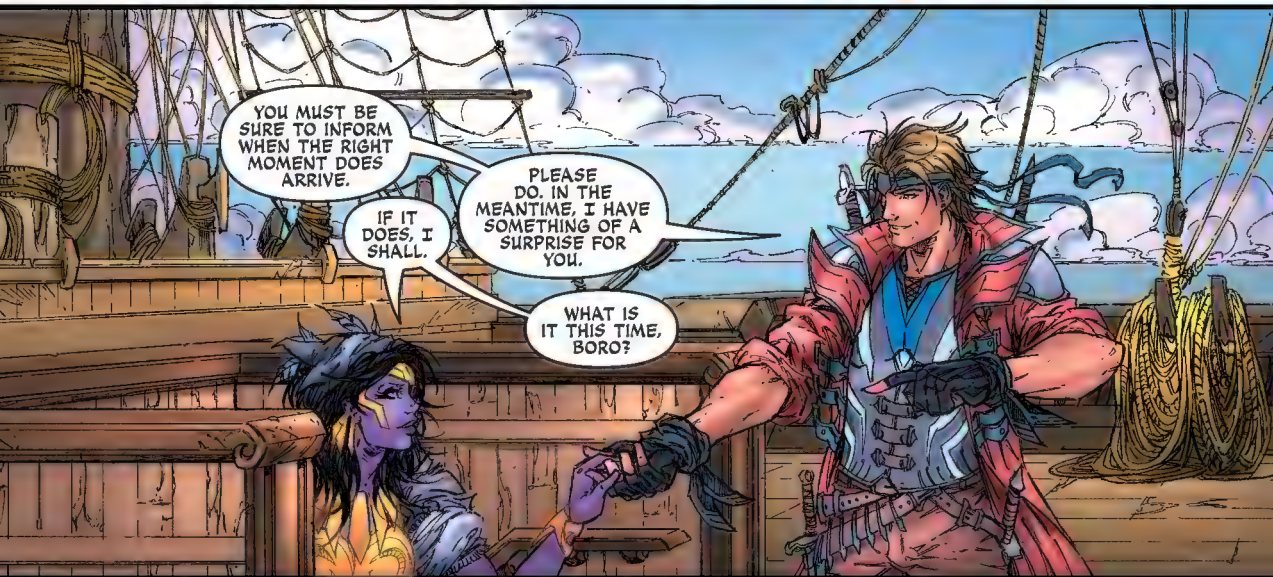
DID YOU SLEEP WELL? YOU SEEM A TAD...WHAT SHALL I SAY...UNSETTLED.

I AM FINE.

PERHAPS YOU SHOULD HAVE TAKEN ME UP ON MY OFFER TO SHARE MY BED. IT IS QUITE COMFORTABLE.



A GENEROUS OFFER, BUT NOT ONE I CAN ACCEPT AT THE PRESENT MOMENT.

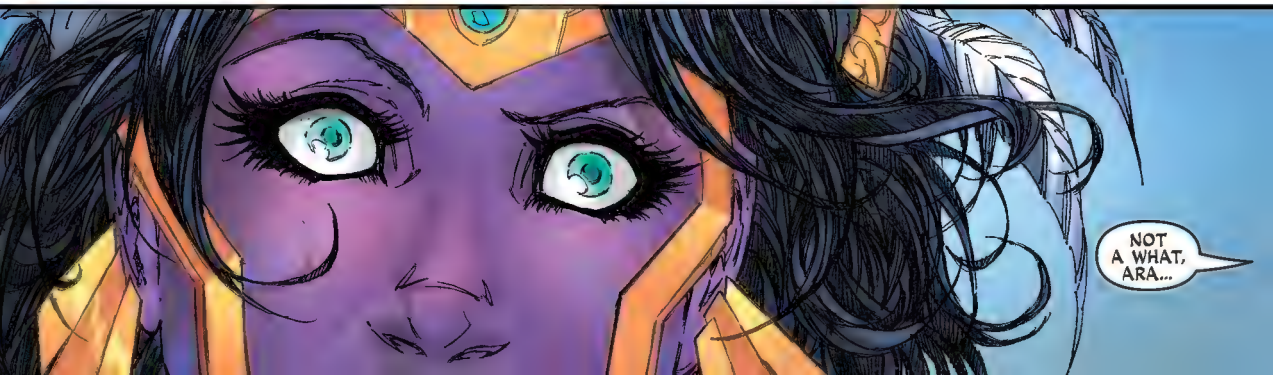


YOU MUST BE SURE TO INFORM WHEN THE RIGHT MOMENT DOES ARRIVE.

IF IT DOES, I SHALL.

PLEASE DO. IN THE MEANTIME, I HAVE SOMETHING OF A SURPRISE FOR YOU.

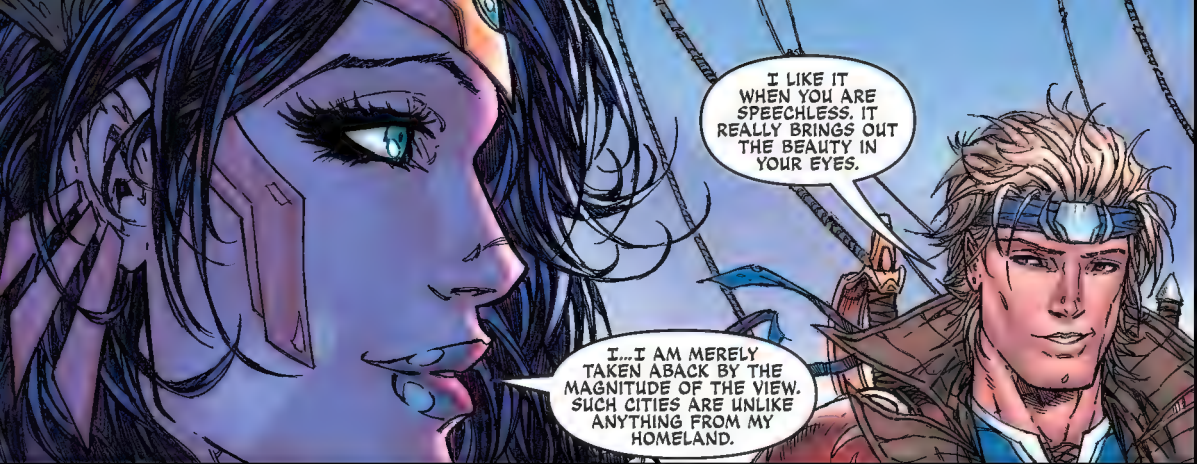
WHAT IS IT THIS TIME, BORO?



NOT A WHAT, ARA...

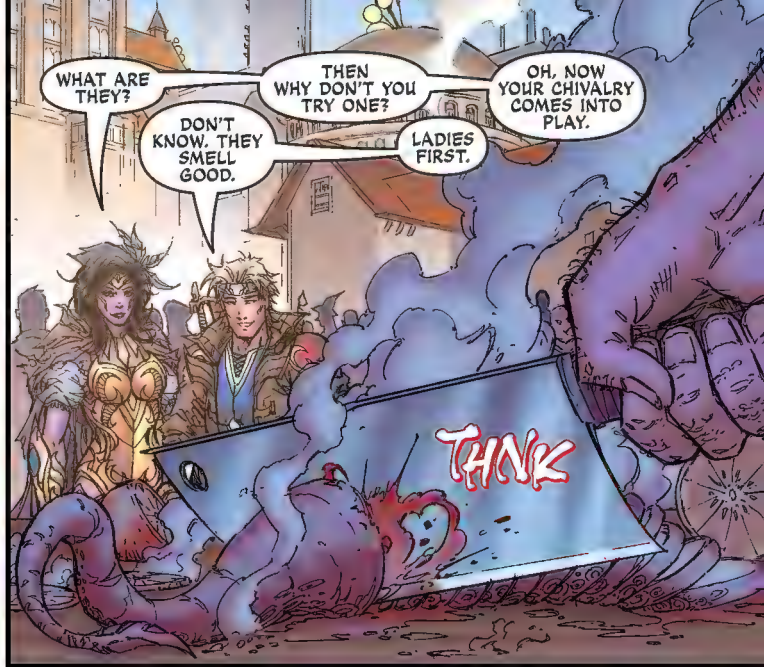
A WHERE.







GOODS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD END UP HERE. BASICALLY, IF IT EXISTS, YOU CAN FIND IT IN MONTESSA.



WHAT ARE THEY?

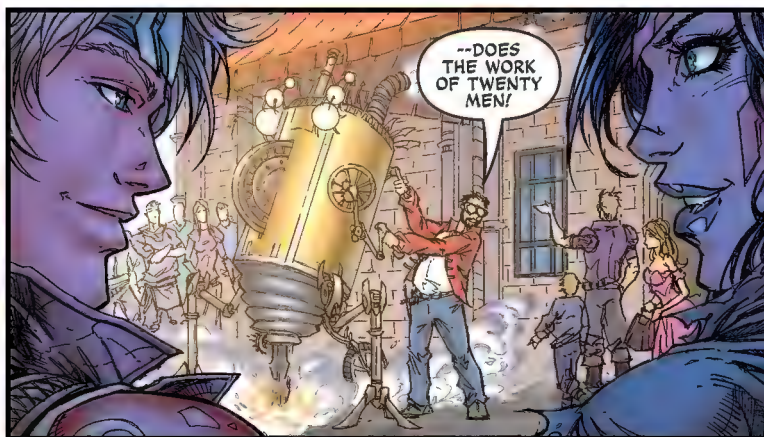
DON'T KNOW. THEY SMELL GOOD.

THEN WHY DON'T YOU TRY ONE?

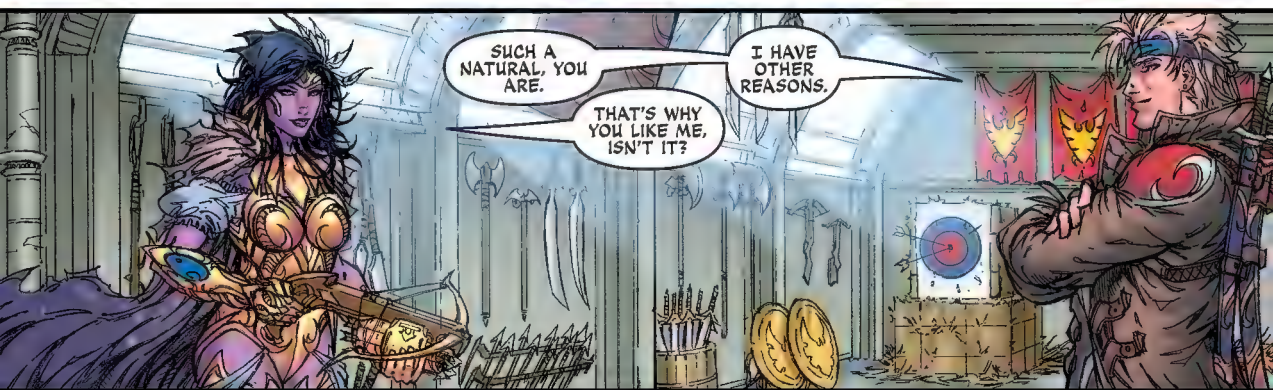
LADIES FIRST.

OH, NOW YOUR CHIVALRY COMES INTO PLAY.

THNK



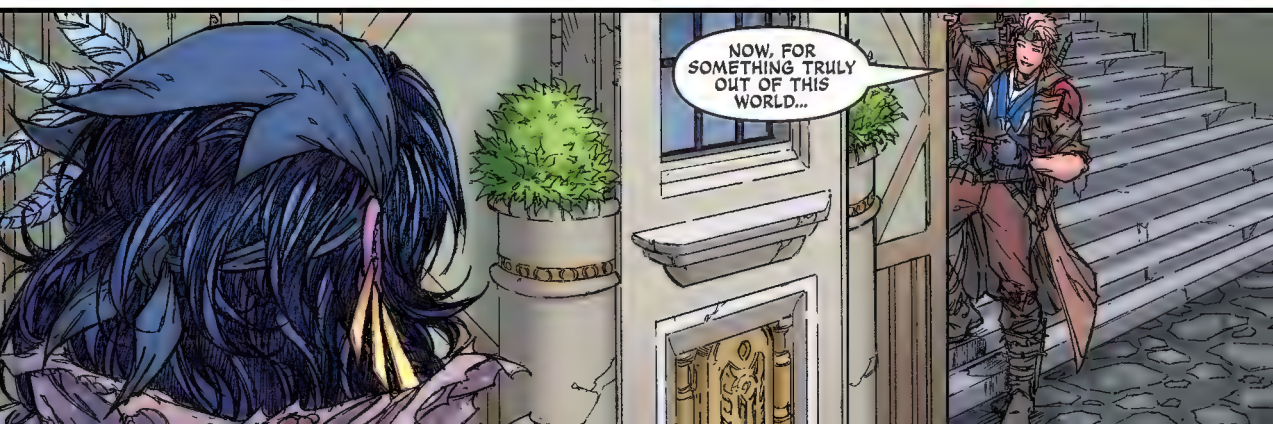
--DOES THE WORK OF TWENTY MEN!



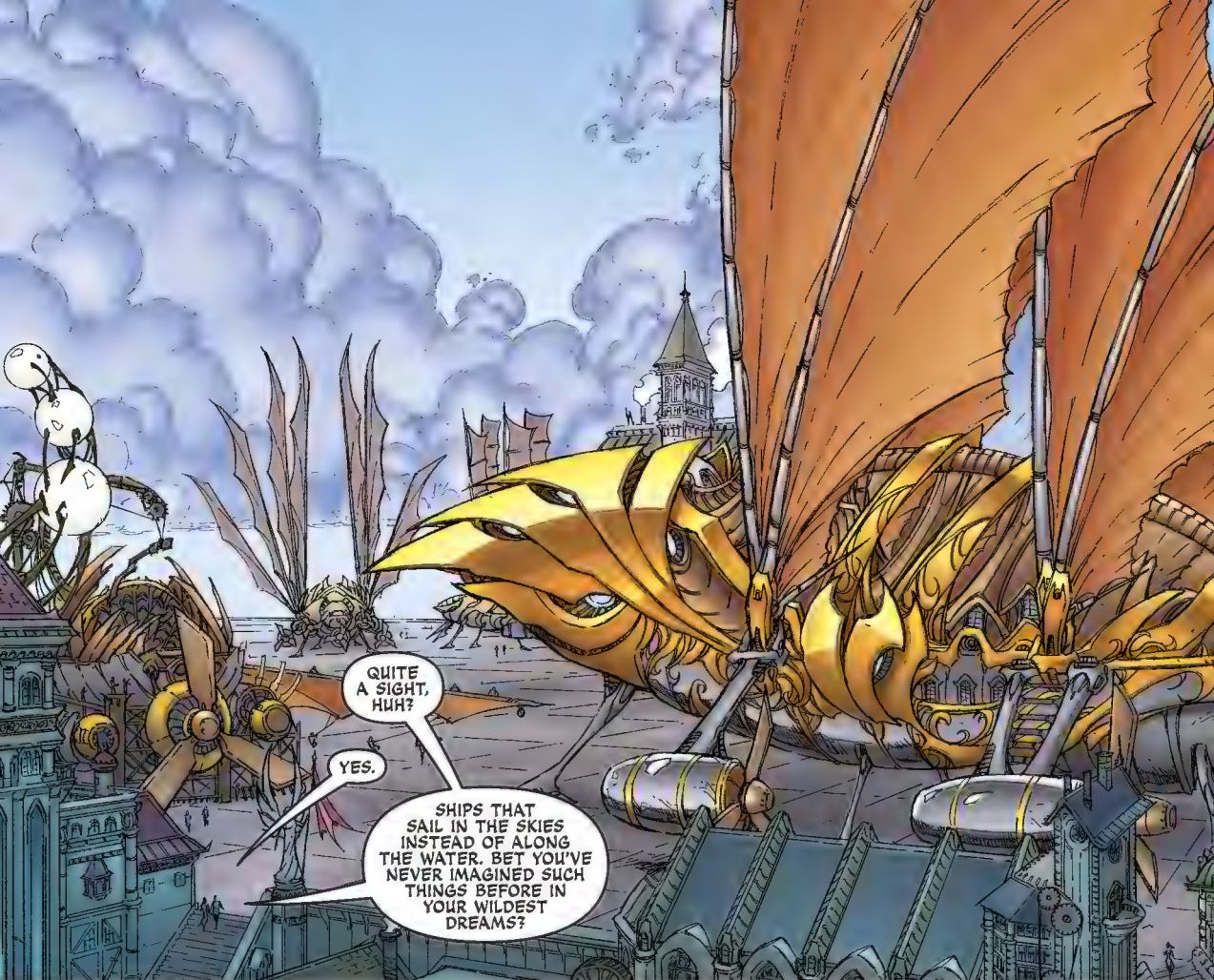
SUCH A NATURAL, YOU ARE.

I HAVE OTHER REASONS.

THAT'S WHY YOU LIKE ME, ISN'T IT?



NOW, FOR SOMETHING TRULY OUT OF THIS WORLD...



QUITE
A SIGHT,
HUH?

YES.

SHIPS THAT
SAIL IN THE SKIES
INSTEAD OF ALONG
THE WATER. BET YOU'VE
NEVER IMAGINED SUCH
THINGS BEFORE IN
YOUR WILDEST
DREAMS?

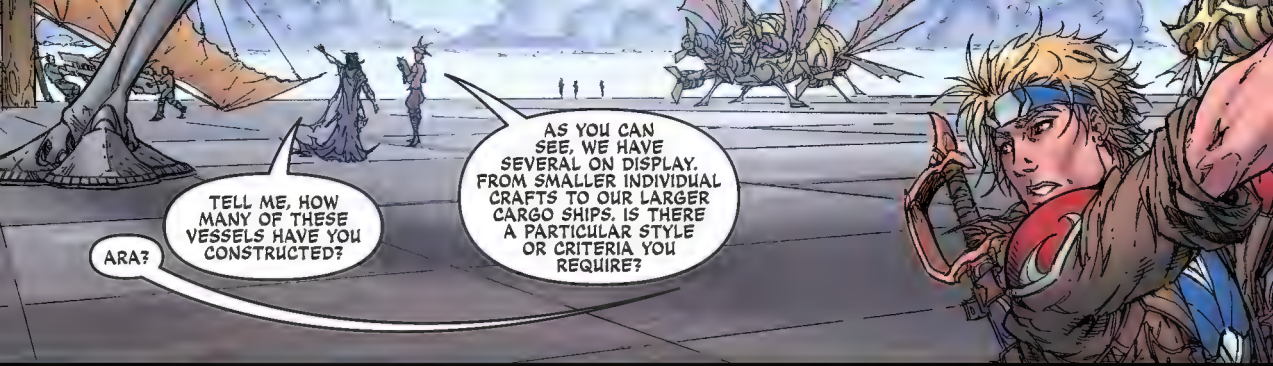


NO.

BUT THEY
HAUNT MY
NIGHTMARES

I'VE HAD
MY EYE ON THIS
ONE FOR QUITE
SOME TIME. JUST
NEED TO SAVE UP
THE FUNDS TO
ACQUIRE IT.

THINK
I'LL CALL IT
"THE HIGH TIDE."
WHAT DO YOU
SAY, ARA?



ARA?

TELL ME, HOW MANY OF THESE VESSELS HAVE YOU CONSTRUCTED?

AS YOU CAN SEE, WE HAVE SEVERAL ON DISPLAY. FROM SMALLER INDIVIDUAL CRAFTS TO OUR LARGER CARGO SHIPS, IS THERE A PARTICULAR STYLE OR CRITERIA YOU REQUIRE?



NO, HOW MANY OF THESE HAVE YOU BUILT AND SOLD? I MEAN TO TRACK DOWN A MAN WHO PURCHASED SUCH A VESSEL.

OUR PRODUCTION HAS DOUBLED OVER THE PAST FEW SEASONS. BEFORE TOO LONG, OUR SHIPS SHALL FILL THE SKIES--



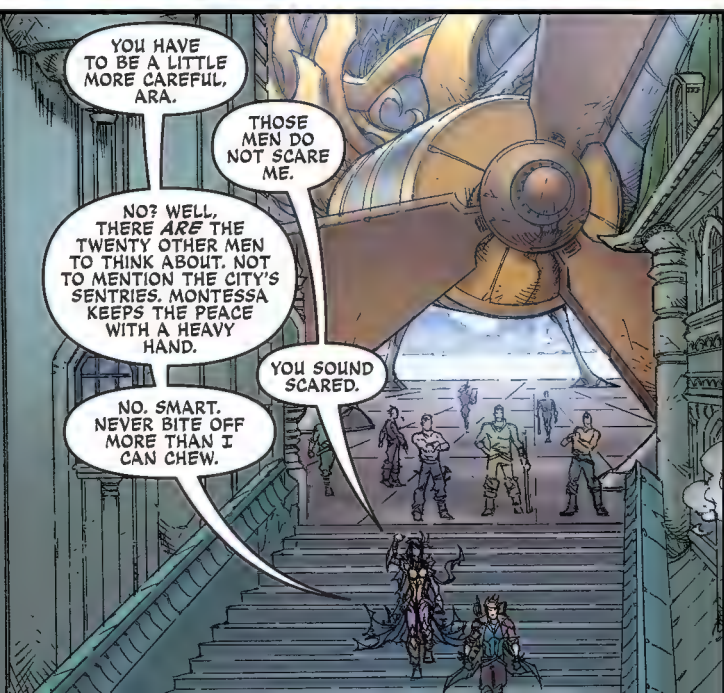
PULL YOUR HEAD OUT OF THE SKIES AND ANSWER MY QUESTION! THE MAN'S NAME IS TORINTHAL. DID YOU SELL HIM ONE OF YOUR SHIPS?



THIS IS IMPORTED SILK!

COME, DEAR. THAT'S NO WAY FOR A LADY TO ACT.

MY APOLOGIES. SHE'S NOT USED TO THE NORMS OF HIGH SOCIETY.



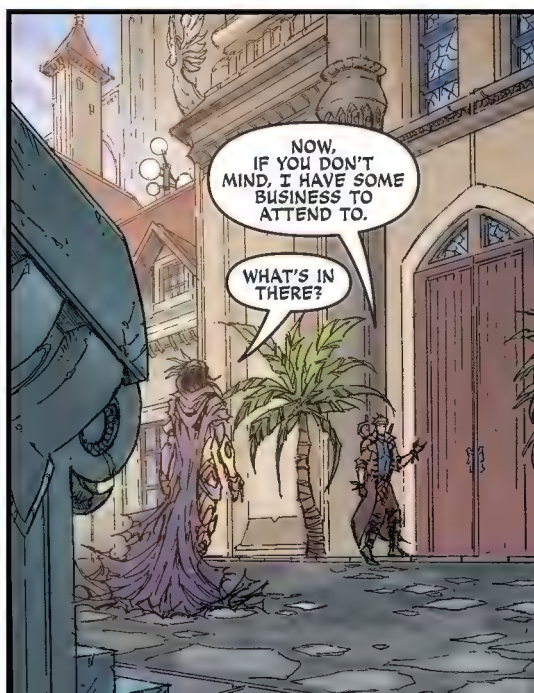
YOU HAVE TO BE A LITTLE MORE CAREFUL, ARA.

THOSE MEN DO NOT SCARE ME.

NO? WELL, THERE ARE THE TWENTY OTHER MEN TO THINK ABOUT. NOT TO MENTION THE CITY'S SENTRIES. MONTESSA KEEPS THE PEACE WITH A HEAVY HAND.

YOU SOUND SCARED.

NO. SMART. NEVER BITE OFF MORE THAN I CAN CHEW.



NOW, IF YOU DON'T MIND, I HAVE SOME BUSINESS TO ATTEND TO.

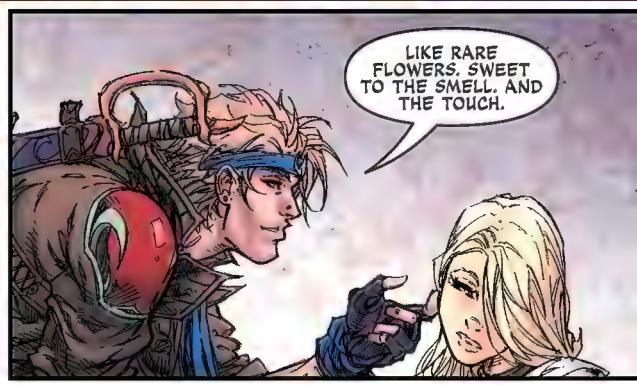
WHAT'S IN THERE?



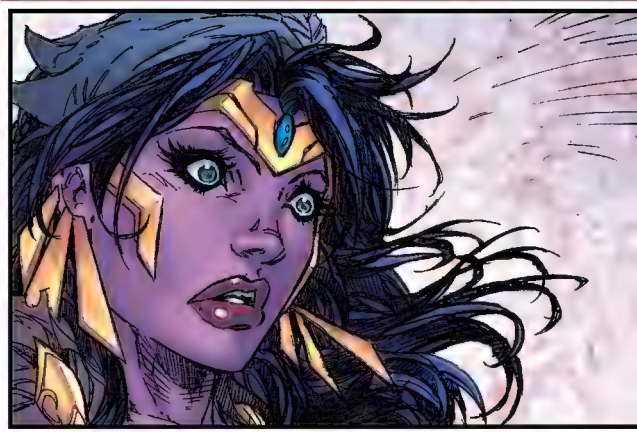
THE CROWN
JEWELS OF
MONTESSA.

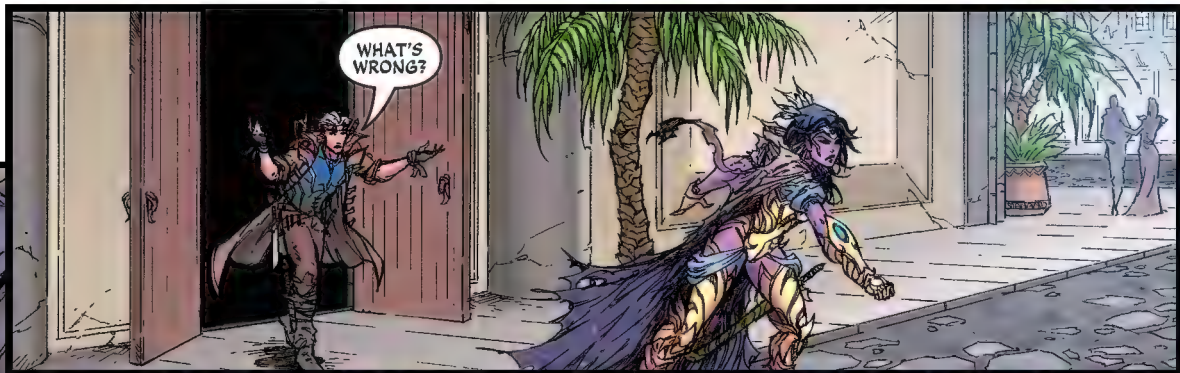
WHAT
IS THIS? WHO
ARE THEY?

ARIANNAS.
THEY GROW WILD
IN THE HIGHLANDS
OF THE FAR
NORTH.



LIKE RARE
FLOWERS, SWEET
TO THE SMELL, AND
THE TOUCH.





WHAT'S
WRONG?



THEY ARE
SLAVES?

THEY ARE
WILD ANIMALS.
THEY CAN NO MORE
BE SLAVES THAN
CATTLE CAN.

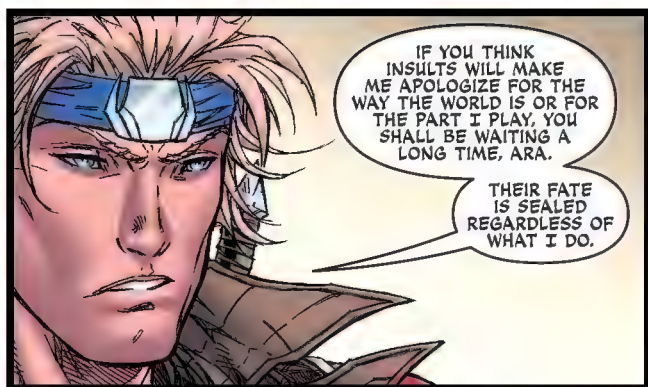


MERELY ONE
OF THE CORNERS IN
THIS TRIANGULAR TRADE OF
OURS. THE ZIAR BUYS THE GIRLS,
WHICH BUYS THE LIVESTOCK
TO BUY MORE ZIAR.

ROUND
AND ROUND
WE GO.



YOU ARE
RIGHT TO DEAL
IN LIVESTOCK. FOR
IT SEEMS YOU ARE
A PIG IN YOUR
OWN RIGHT.



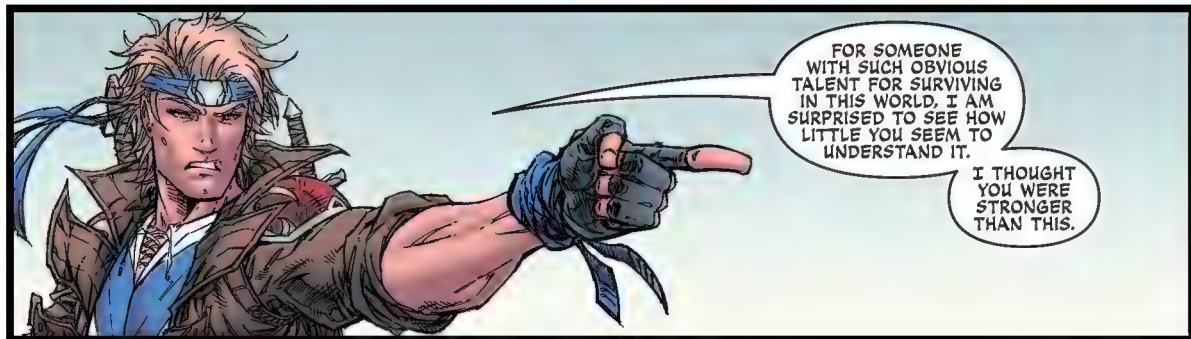
IF YOU THINK
INSULTS WILL MAKE
ME APOLOGIZE FOR THE
WAY THE WORLD IS OR FOR
THE PART I PLAY, YOU
SHALL BE WAITING A
LONG TIME, ARA.

THEIR FATE
IS SEALED
REGARDLESS OF
WHAT I DO.



SPARE ME
YOUR EXCUSES.
WE ALL CHART OUR
COURSE IN LIFE.
YOUR WORDS,
BORO.

AND, I SEE
NOW WHERE
YOUR COURSE
LEADS.



FOR SOMEONE
WITH SUCH OBVIOUS
TALENT FOR SURVIVING
IN THIS WORLD, I AM
SURPRISED TO SEE HOW
LITTLE YOU SEEM TO
UNDERSTAND IT.

I THOUGHT
YOU WERE
STRONGER
THAN THIS.



FUNNY,
I THOUGHT
THE SAME THING
ABOUT YOU.



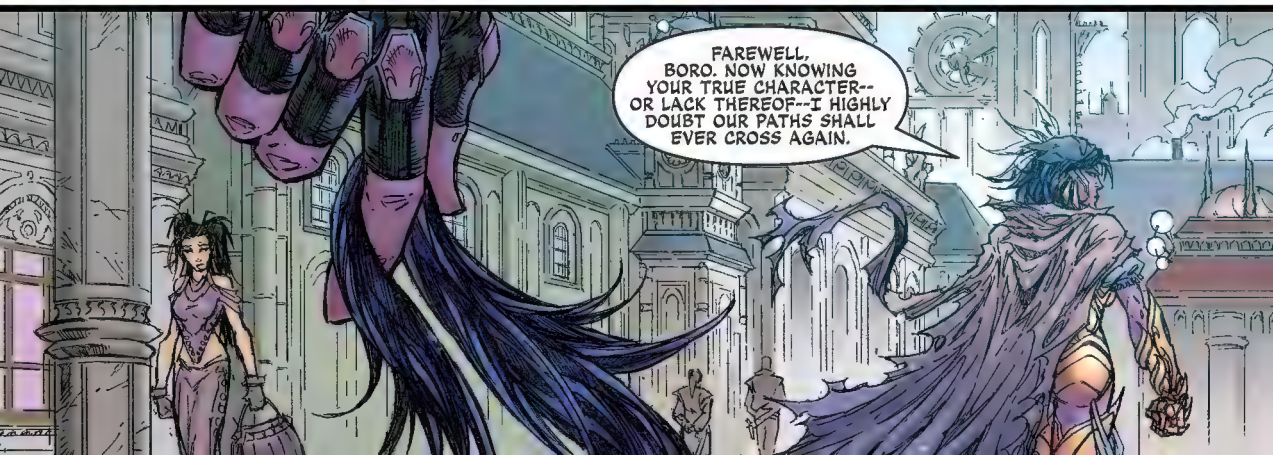
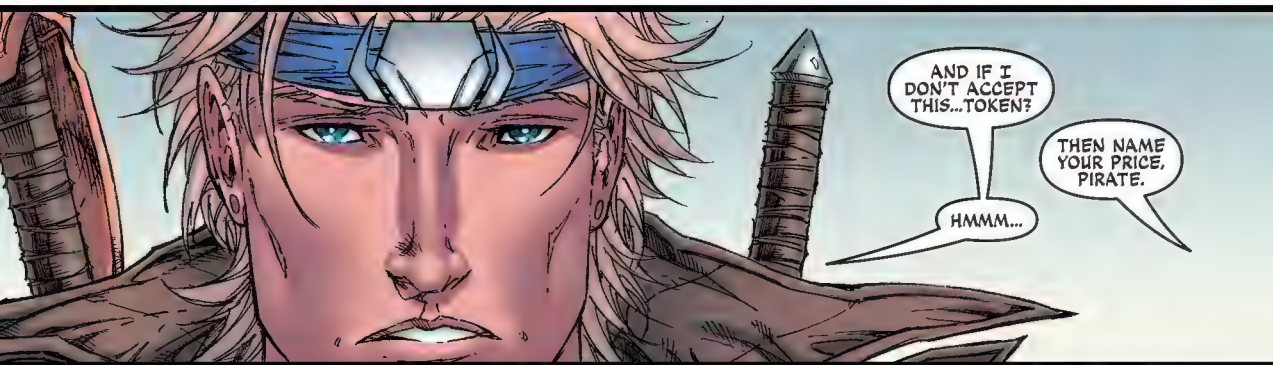
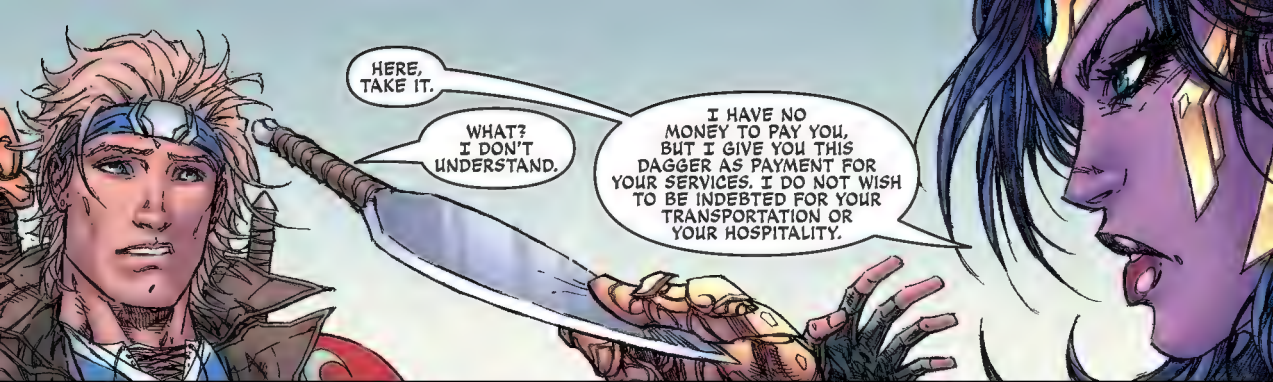
ARA...



DO
NOT TOUCH
ME.

I KNOW
HOW MUCH YOU
VALUE YOUR OWN SKIN,
BORO. I SUSPECT YOU
WOULD HATE TO LOSE
ANYTHING AS VITAL AS
ONE OF YOUR HANDS.
OR MORE.

EASY!

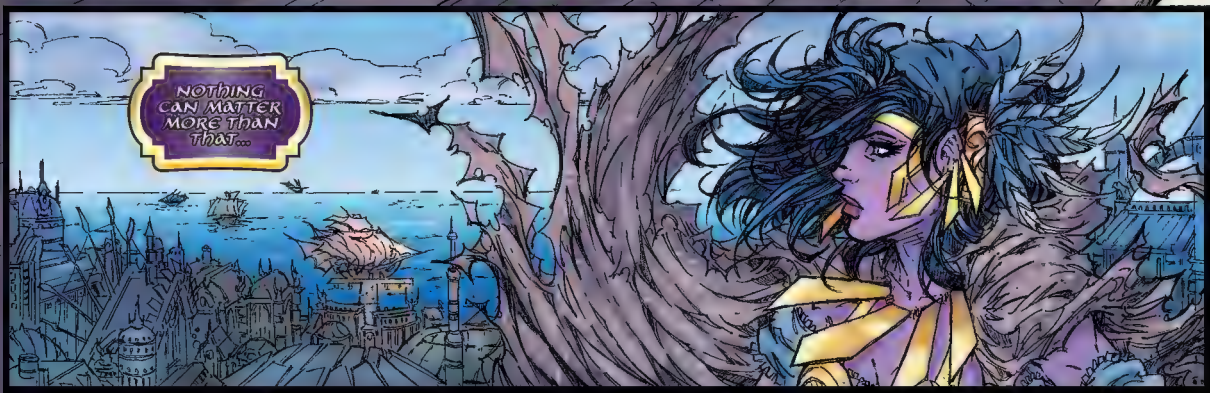




I LOATHE
BORO, BUT HE
DID BRING ME TO
MONTESSE—AND TO
MY FIRST REAL CLUE
TOWARD FINDING
MY MOTHER.



ONCE AGAIN,
MY HOPES ARE
INVIGORATED. THE
PATH OF MY QUEST
IS CLEAR.



NOTHING
CAN MATTER
MORE THAN
THAT...



A FINE CROP.
WOULDN'T YOU
SAY, BORO?

I SUPPOSE.

YET, YOU SEEM
DISPLEASED. WAS
THE TRADESMAN'S
BARGAIN NOT TO
YOUR LIKING?

THE EXCHANGE
WAS FAIR, BUT I
SUSPECT WE STILL LOST
OUT TO MONTESSA THIS
TIME AROUND, MORTOG.
YES, WE ACQUIRED A
DOZEN GIRLS TO
TRADE.



BUT, WE
LOST ONE FINE
WOMAN.



DOWN
YOU GO.



FASTER!



TO BE
CONTINUED.



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15 arciniaga



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"sacrificial lambs"

VOLUME TWO - CHAPTER FOUR OF FIVE

Written by J.T. KRUL • Pencils by V KEN MARION
Digital Inks by MARK ROSLAN • Colors by WES HARTMAN
Letters by JOSH REED

PREVIOUSLY:

Ara found another clue in the search for her mother in the awe-inspiring city of Montessa. However, she also discovered that Boro's trade exploits involved the callous slavery and trade of captured women. With such news, Ara risked her life to infiltrate and hide among the slaves, in the hope of freeing them and learning more about her mother's past.

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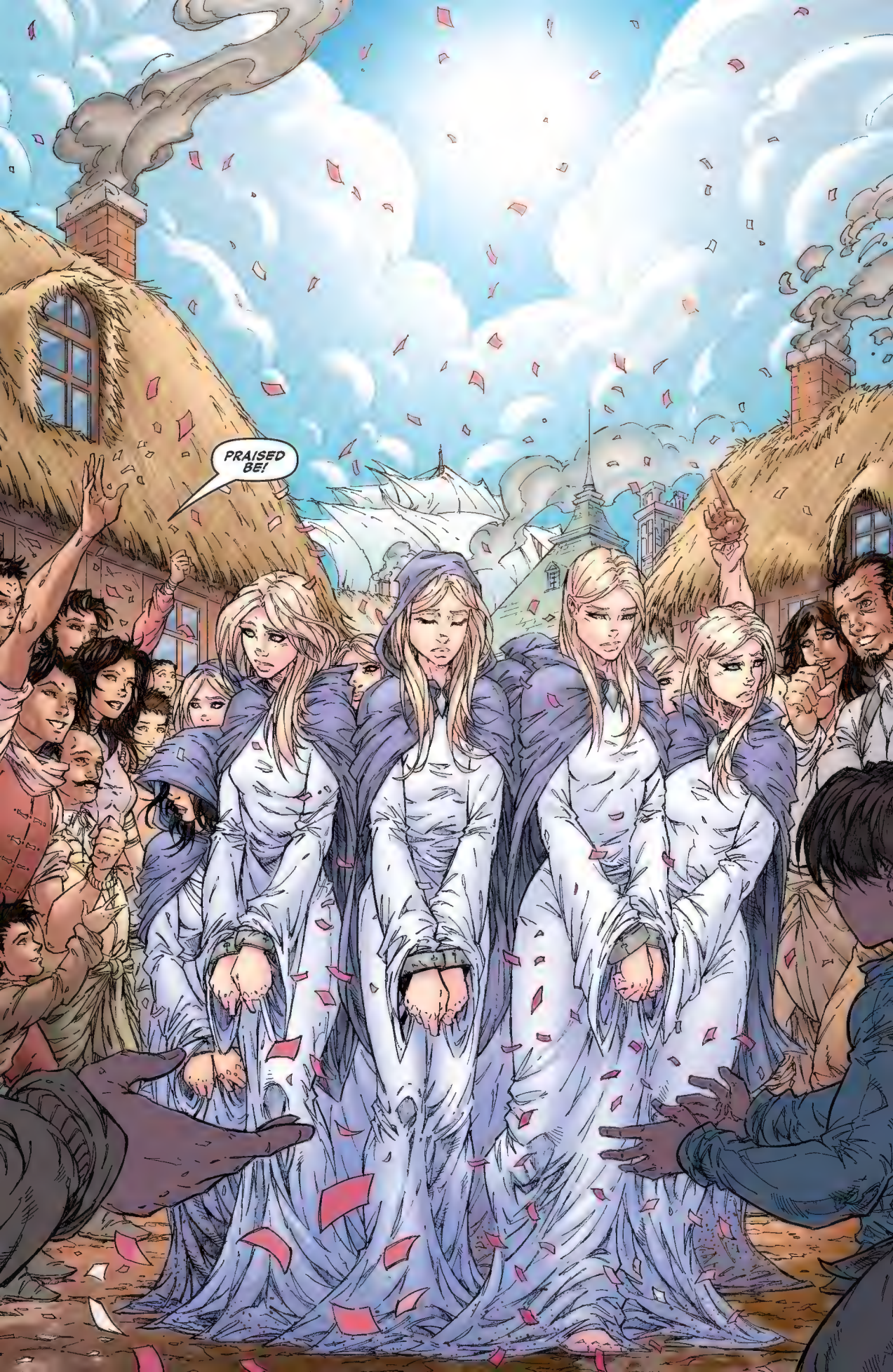
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PRAISED BE!



THEY ACT AS THOUGH WE ARE SOMETHING TO TREASURE. ARE THEY COMPLETELY OBVIOUS TO OUR BONDAGE?



ANOTHER FINE SELECTION, BORO. THE GREAT AND POWERFUL R'ANU WILL BE PLEASED INDEED.

WHEREVER DO YOU FIND THEM?

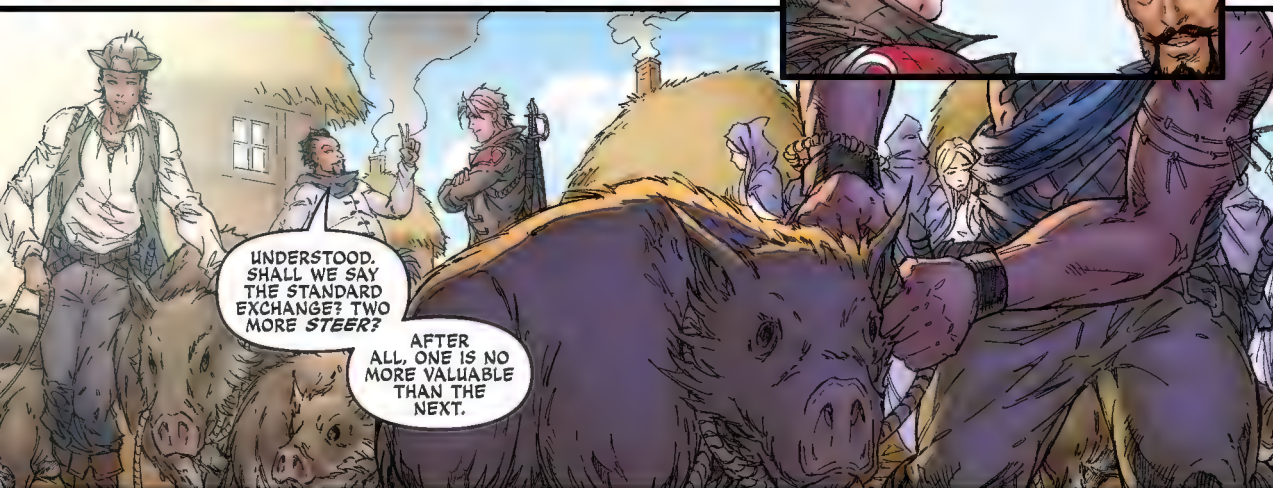
TRADE SECRET. I AM AFRAID.



HMMM. THAT'S STRANGE. I SAID TEN, BUT WE SEEM TO HAVE ELEVEN.

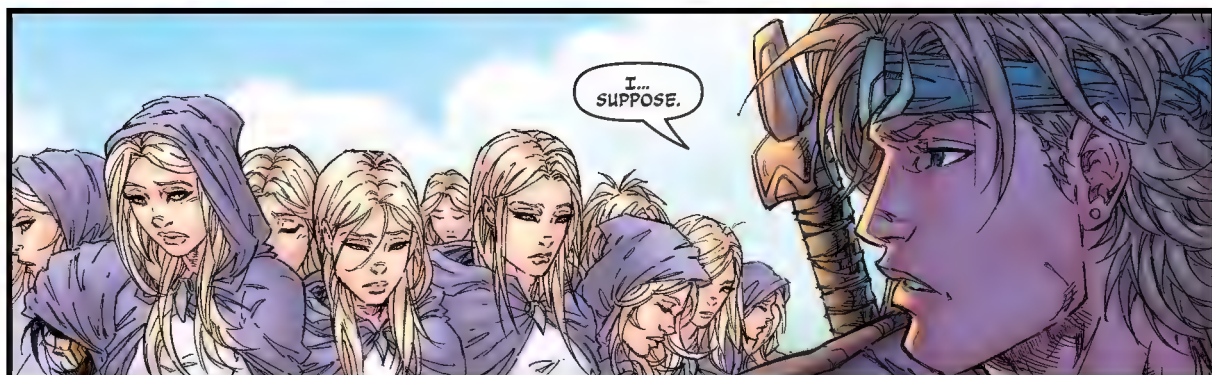
AN ADDITIONAL OFFERING TO OUR PROTECTOR? A GIFT?

SADLY NO, RENARD. AN OVERSIGHT. ONE THAT MUST BE COMPENSATED FOR.

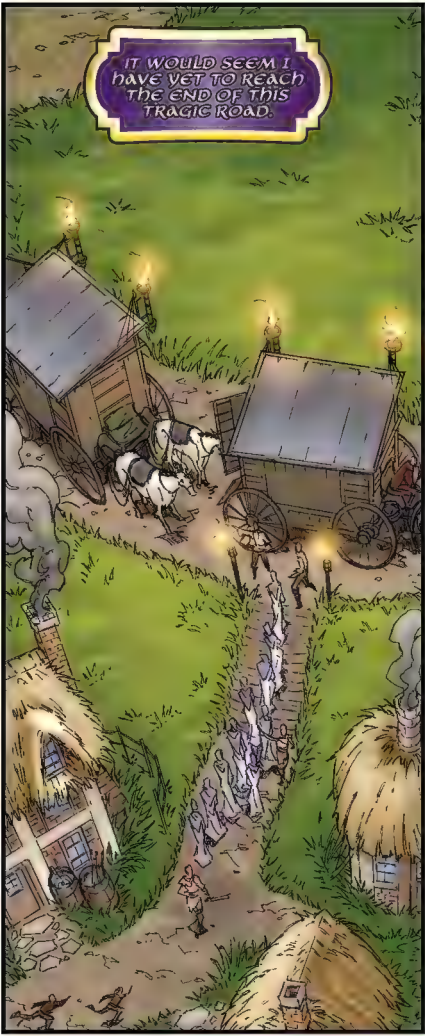


UNDERSTOOD. SHALL WE SAY THE STANDARD EXCHANGE? TWO MORE STEER?

AFTER ALL, ONE IS NO MORE VALUABLE THAN THE NEXT.



I... SUPPOSE.



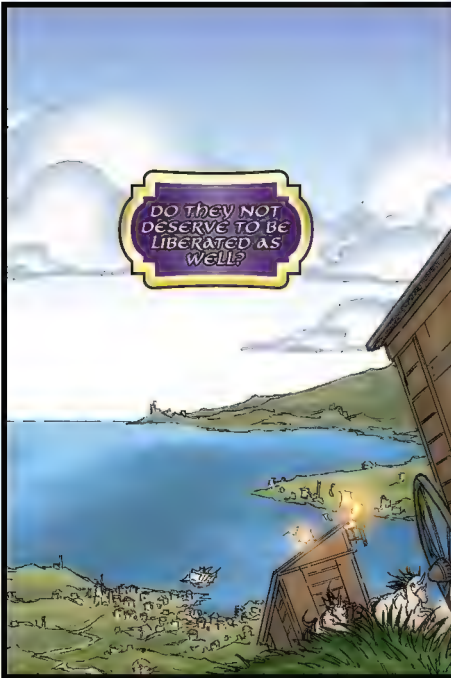
IT WOULD SEEM I
HAVE YET TO REACH
THE END OF THIS
TRAGIC ROAD.



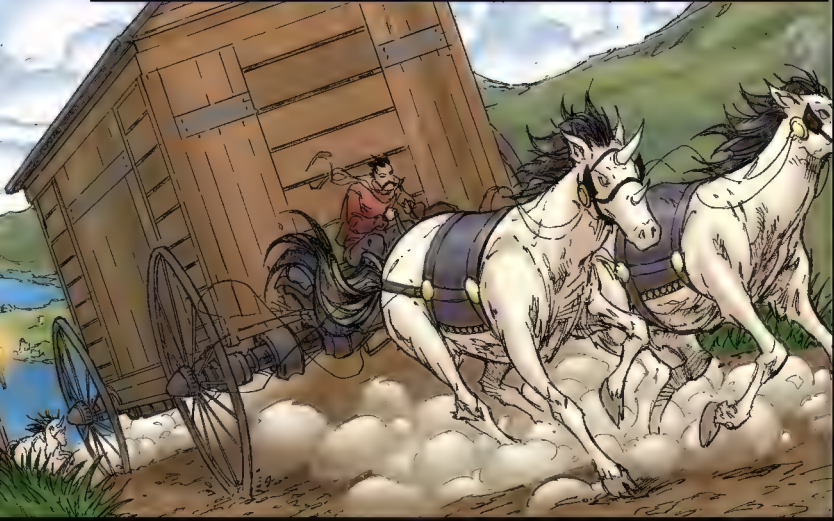
I HAVE SMUGGLED MYSELF AMONGST THESE
WOMEN SO THAT I MIGHT SAVE THEM, CHANGE
THEIR FATE. BUT THIS TRADE ROUTE OF BORO'S
HAS BEEN GOING ON FOR SOME TIME.

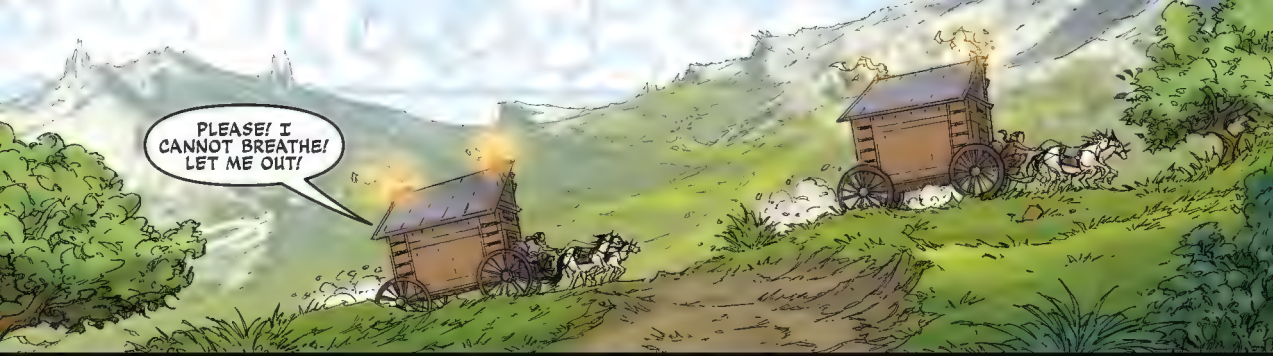


WHICH MEANS
THERE ARE MORE
MORE POOR SOULS
RIPPED AWAY FROM
THEIR HOMELAND.



DO THEY NOT
DESERVE TO BE
LIBERATED AS
WELL?





PLEASE! I
CANNOT BREATHE!
LET ME OUT!



CALM
YOURSELF.

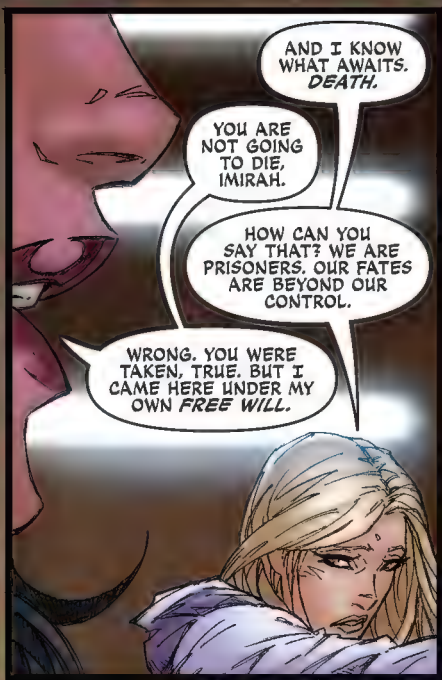
TELL ME,
WHAT IS YOUR
NAME?

IMIRAH...
MY NAME IS
IMIRAH.



IT IS
GOING TO
BE OKAY,
IMIRAH.

NO, I'VE
SEEN OTHERS TAKEN
BEFORE, NEVER TO RETURN.
AND NOW, I AM JUST AS
FOREVER LOST.



AND I KNOW
WHAT AWAITS.
DEATH.

YOU ARE
NOT GOING
TO DIE,
IMIRAH.

HOW CAN YOU
SAY THAT? WE ARE
PRISONERS. OUR FATES
ARE BEYOND OUR
CONTROL.

WRONG. YOU WERE
TAKEN, TRUE. BUT I
CAME HERE UNDER MY
OWN FREE WILL.



AND WHEN
THE TIME COMES,
I'LL LEAVE UNDER
IT AS WELL...



WE ALL WILL.



ON BEHALF OF
THE PEOPLE OF
NINDRALIN, WE ARE
PROUD TO PRESENT R'ANU
WITH THIS OFFERING
OF WAYWARD
SPIRITS.



MAY HIS
GREATNESS HELP
THEM REACH
NIRVANA.



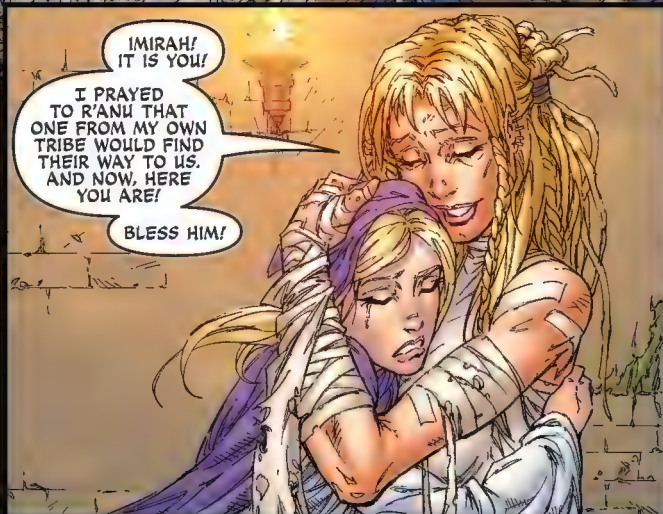


WELCOME,
WELCOME ALL
OF YOU.

YOUR JOURNEY
MUST HAVE BEEN LONG
AND WEARISOME. COME.
REST.



HAR...
HARETH?



IMIRAH!
IT IS YOU!

I PRAYED
TO R'ANU THAT
ONE FROM MY OWN
TRIBE WOULD FIND
THEIR WAY TO US.
AND NOW, HERE
YOU ARE!

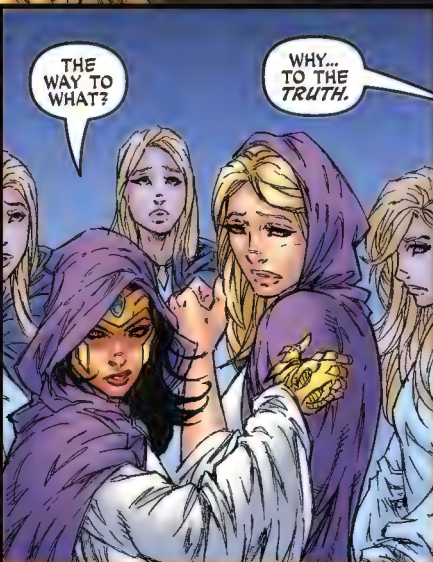
BLESS HIM!



FIND MY
WAY? I WAS
DRAGGED HERE, AS
WERE YOU. STOLEN
IN THE NIGHT.
REMEMBER?

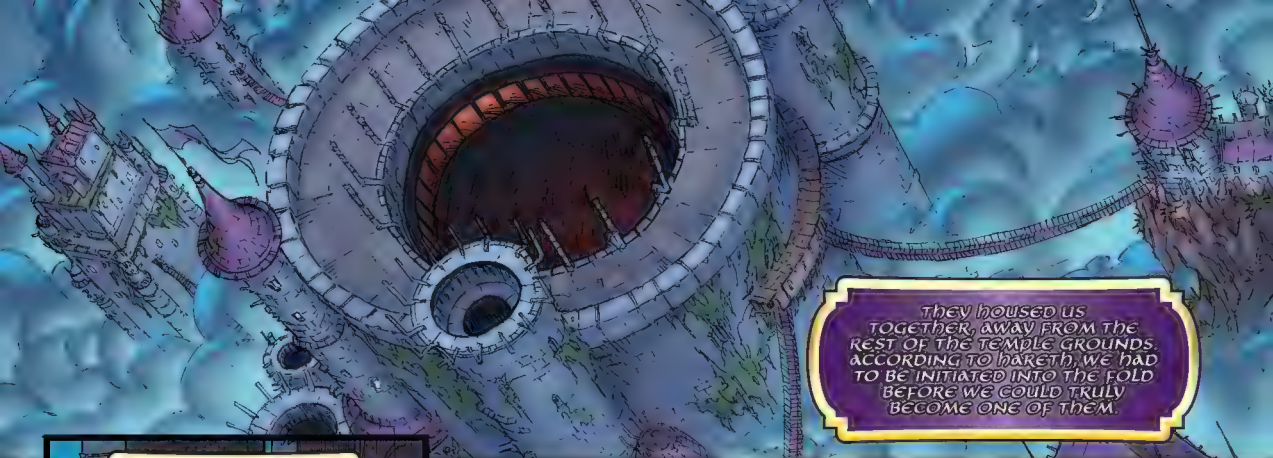


IT IS LIKE
A DREAM. OR RATHER
A NIGHTMARE. THAT OLD
LIFE OF MINE. HERE--THIS
IS MY HOME, NOW. YOU SHALL
SEE, YOU SHALL COME TO
KNOW. R'ANU IS THE
LIGHT. HE WILL SHOW
YOU THE WAY.



THE
WAY TO
WHAT?

WHY...
TO THE
TRUTH.



THEY HOUSED US TOGETHER, AWAY FROM THE REST OF THE TEMPLE GROUNDS. ACCORDING TO HARETH, WE HAD TO BE INITIATED INTO THE FOLD BEFORE WE COULD TRULY BECOME ONE OF THEM.

MY SECRET WAS SAFE FOR THE MOMENT, BUT IT WOULD ONLY BE A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE I WAS DISCOVERED.



WHEN THEY CAME FOR IMIRAH AND SOME OF THE OTHERS, I HAD THE NOTION TO ACT. BUT, SOMETHING COMPELLED ME TO WAIT.

SOMETHING WAS MISSING.



DAYS LATER, WE WERE BROUGHT TO ONE OF THE MAIN TEMPLES.

THAT WAS WHERE I FIRST SET EYES UPON THIS SAVIOR OF THEIRS--



R'ANU.

MY CHILDREN.
THE WELLSPRING OF
OUR ENERGY GROWS WITH
EACH AND EVERY NEW
ARRIVAL. AND WE
ARE BLESSED.





I SAY CHILDREN
BECAUSE THOUGH YOUR
PHYSICAL FORMS EMERGED
IN OTHER PARTS OF THIS WORLD,
YOU HAVE BEEN AND WILL ALWAYS
BE PART OF ME. CONNECTED.
UNITED. A SINGULAR FORCE
IN THE UNIVERSE.



I FOUND IT
STRANGE THAT IMIRAH
AND THE OTHERS TAKEN EARLY
WERE NOT PRESENT FOR
THIS SERMON.



BUT THEN I
SOON REALIZED IT
WAS BECAUSE THEY
WERE INTENDED TO
BE A PART OF IT.

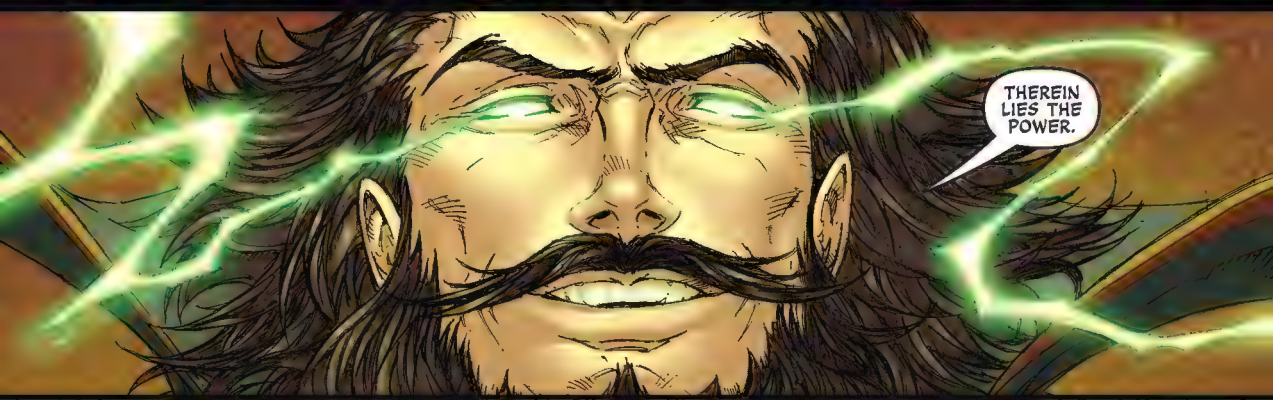
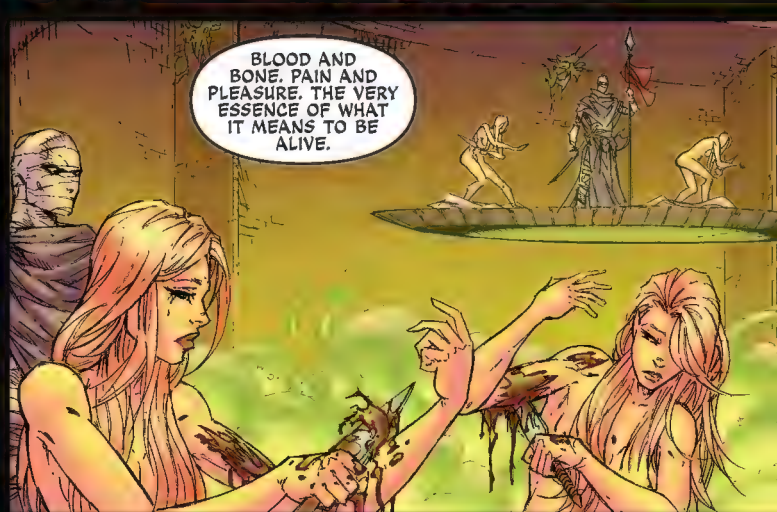
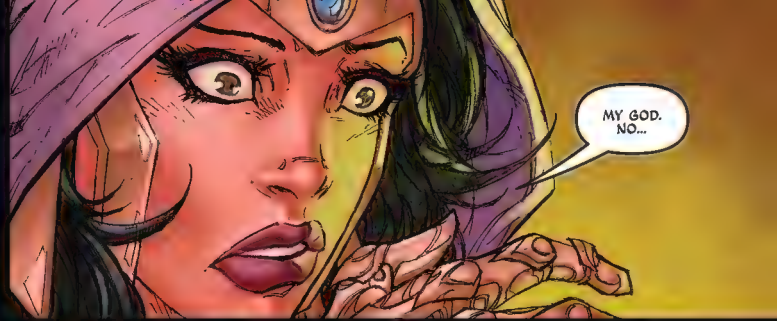
WE SEE
OUR FORMS AS
OUR PURE SELVES,
BUT NOTHING COULD
BE FURTHER FROM
THE TRUTH.



OUR SKIN,
OUR FLESH. THESE
ARE OUR CAGES. THESE
ARE THE THINGS THAT
CONCEAL OUR
SOULS.



FOR
UNDERNEATH
THESE LAYERS
OF DECEIT.





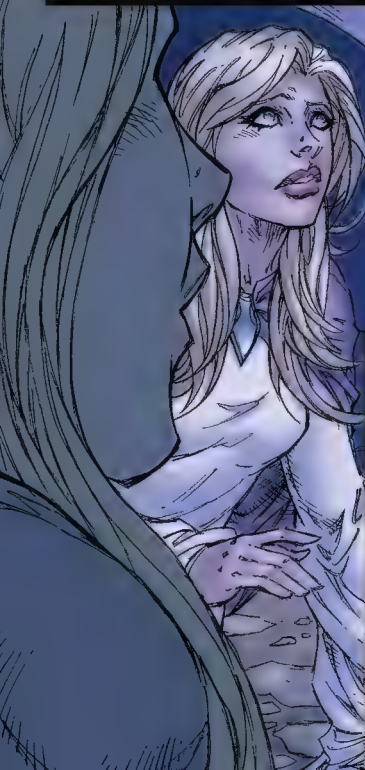
IN MY
EFFORTS TO FREE
THEM ALL, IMIRAH AND
THE OTHERS HAVE ALREADY
PAID THE PRICE. I
CANNOT WAIT
ANYMORE.



WAKE UP.
ALL OF YOU. WE
SHALL NOT SUFFER
THE SAME AS OUR
FRIENDS.

BUT THERE
IS NO ESCAPE
FROM HERE. NOBODY
IS COMING TO
SAVE US.

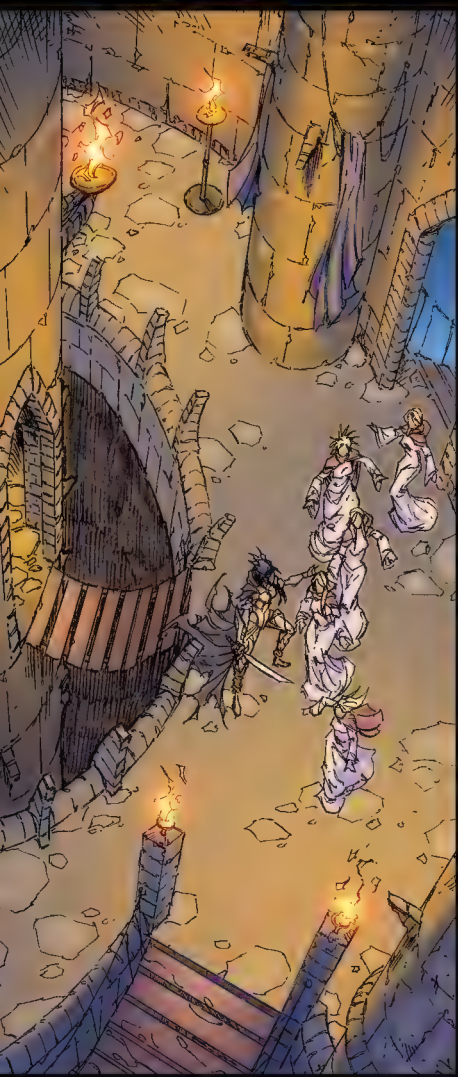
WE
SHALL SAVE
OURSELVES.







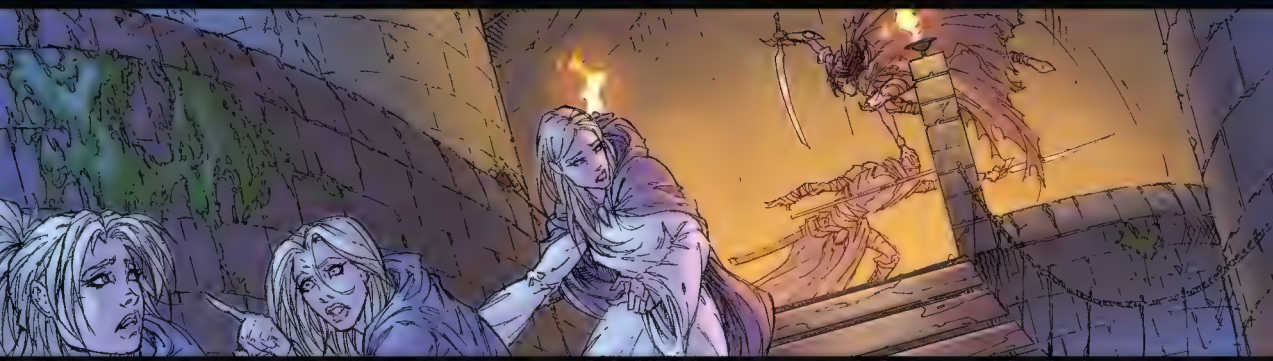
THIS WAY. WE MUST MAKE OUR WAY DOWN.



THESE GUARDS ARE USED TO INTIMIDATING THE SMALLER SLAVES.



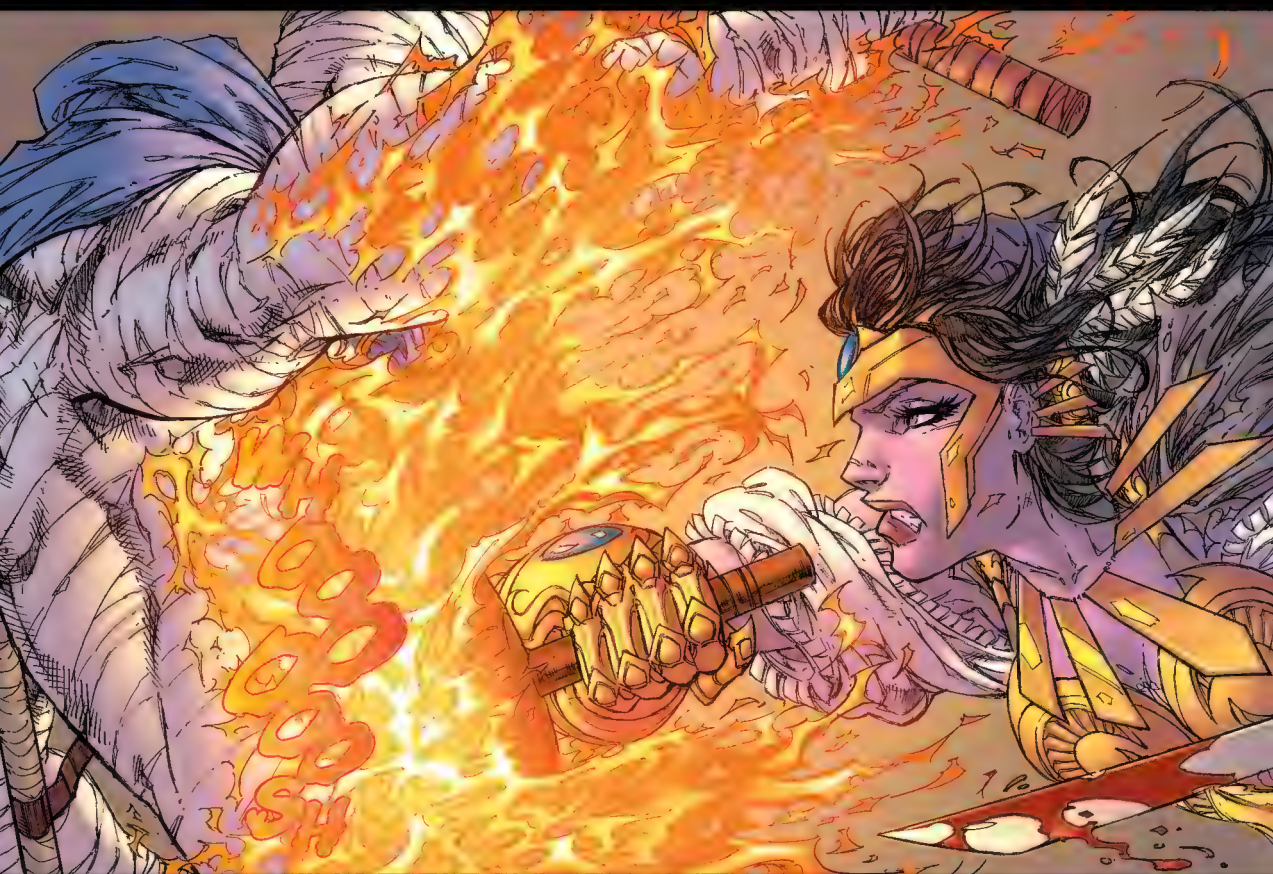
I WONDER HOW THEY WILL RESPOND TO SOMEONE MORE FORMIDABLE.





MY STRIKE
WAS DEEP,
BUT DID NOT
EVEN SLOW
IT DOWN.

NO
MATTER
THE STRIKE, IT
DOES NOT
FALTER.





FIRE CAN
BE A POWERFUL
WEAPON.



BUT THERE IS
AN INHERENT DANGER
THAT COMES WITH IT.



IT CANNOT BE
CONTROLLED.



IF YOU
ARE NOT
CAREFUL.



--YOU CAN
EASILY GET
BURNED AS
WELL.

TO BE
CONTINUED.



ASPEN

VOL. 2

#5

OF 5

COVER A

By Keith & Ken Mather
Written by Keith Mather

Jirni



VK 15
BAT
TV



VOL. 2

#5

OF 5
COVER B

J. C. KRUE • Y. KEN M.
WES DARTMAN • JOSH

Jirni



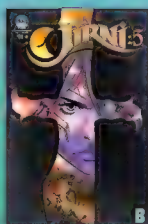


Direct Edition

Volume 1

Issue 1

JUAN FERNANDEZ



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Volume 1

Issue 2

JUAN FERNANDEZ



"the razor's edge"

VOLUME TWO - CHAPTER FIVE OF FIVE

Written by J.T. KRUL • Pencils by V KEN MARION
Digital Inks by MARK ROSLAN • Colors by WES HARTMAN
Letters by JOSH REED

PREVIOUSLY:

Ara smuggled herself amongst Boro's slaves in order to change their fate towards freedom. However, she was taken to the temple of the wizard B'au and witnessed the sacrificial atrocities he committed firsthand, hastening her decision to act. Yet B'au's promised army of warriors made her rescue attempt far more fatal than anticipated.

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Jirni™ Vol. 2 Issue 5

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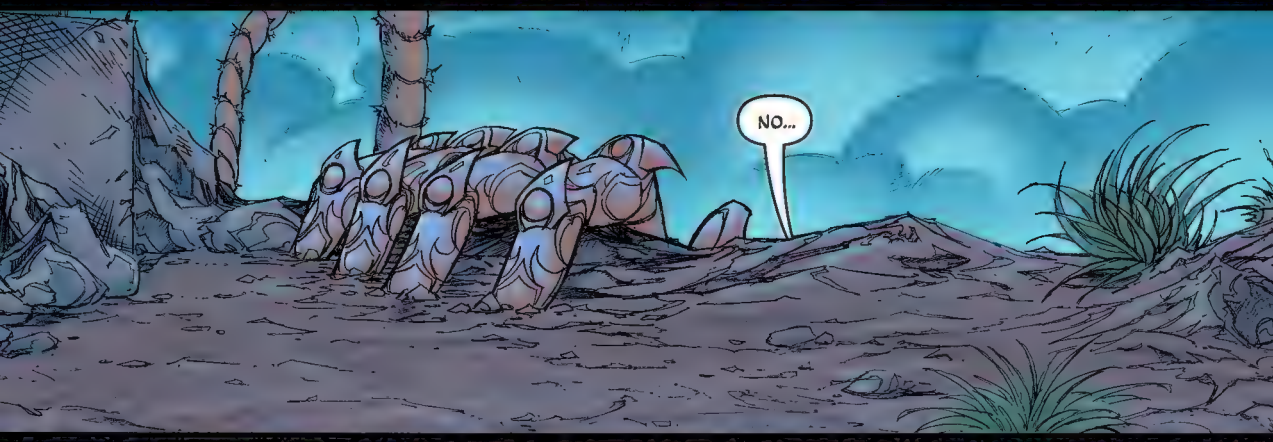
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DID SHE...?

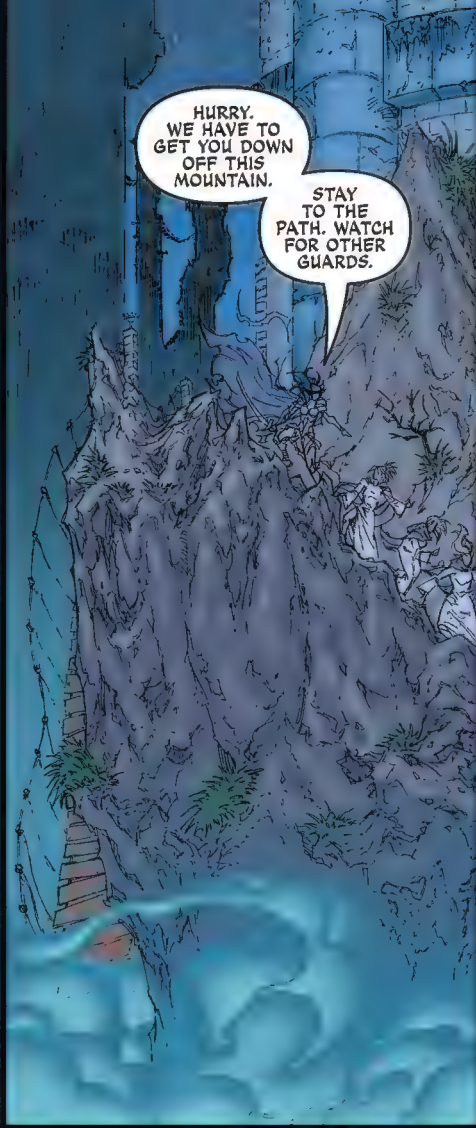
IS SHE...?



NO...



...I AM NOT DEAD.



HURRY.
WE HAVE TO
GET YOU DOWN
OFF THIS
MOUNTAIN.

STAY
TO THE
PATH. WATCH
FOR OTHER
GUARDS.



YOU HAVE TO
COME WITH US. WE
WILL NOT MAKE IT
WITHOUT YOU.

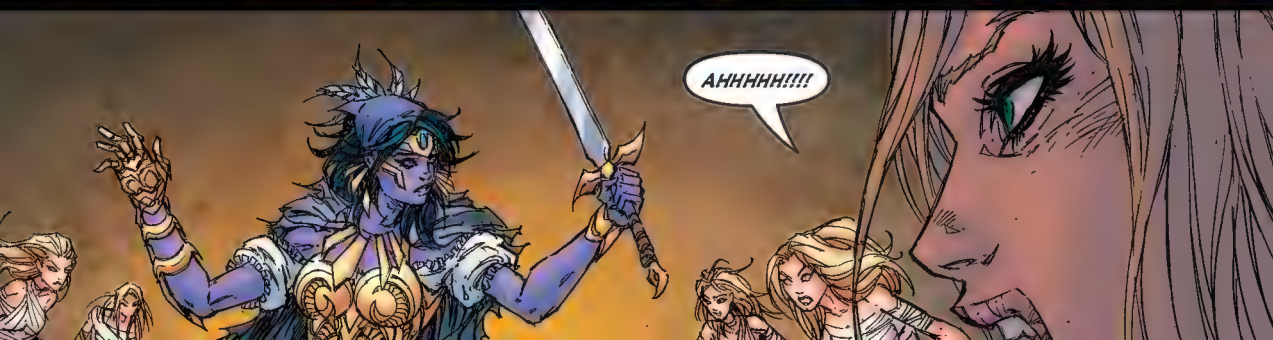
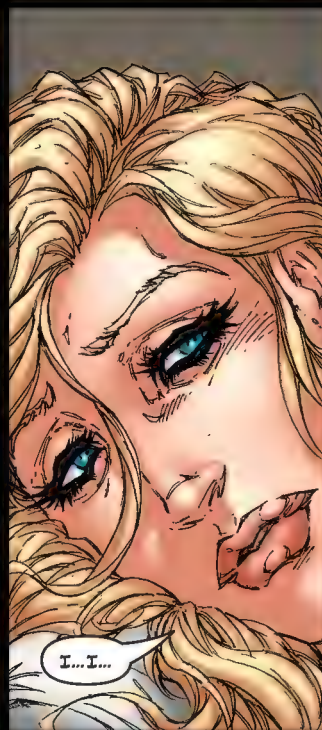
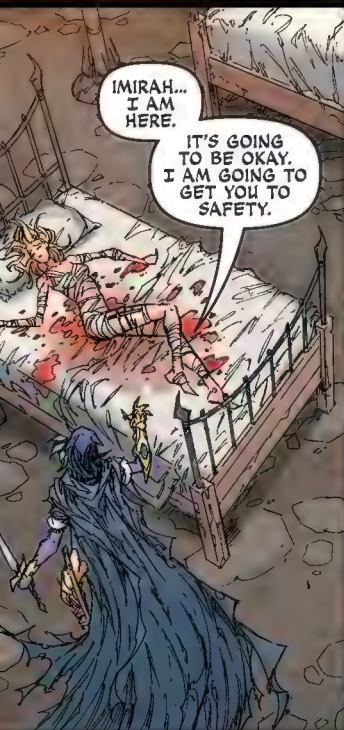
I WILL
BE RIGHT
BEHIND YOU, BUT I
CANNOT LEAVE
YET.



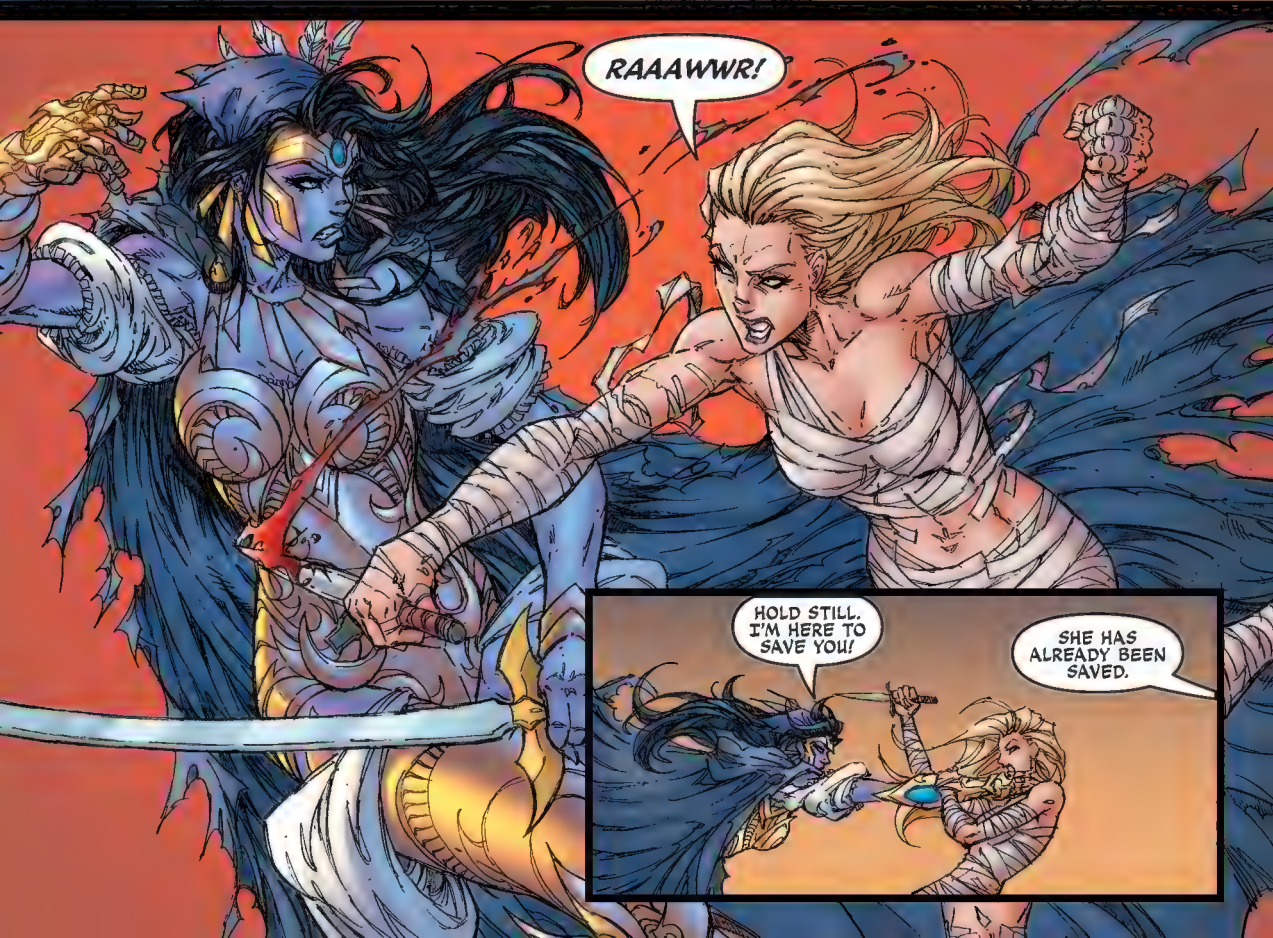
THERE
ARE OTHER
SOULS IN NEED
OF SAVING.



I ONLY
HOPE THAT
I'LL FIND
THEM...





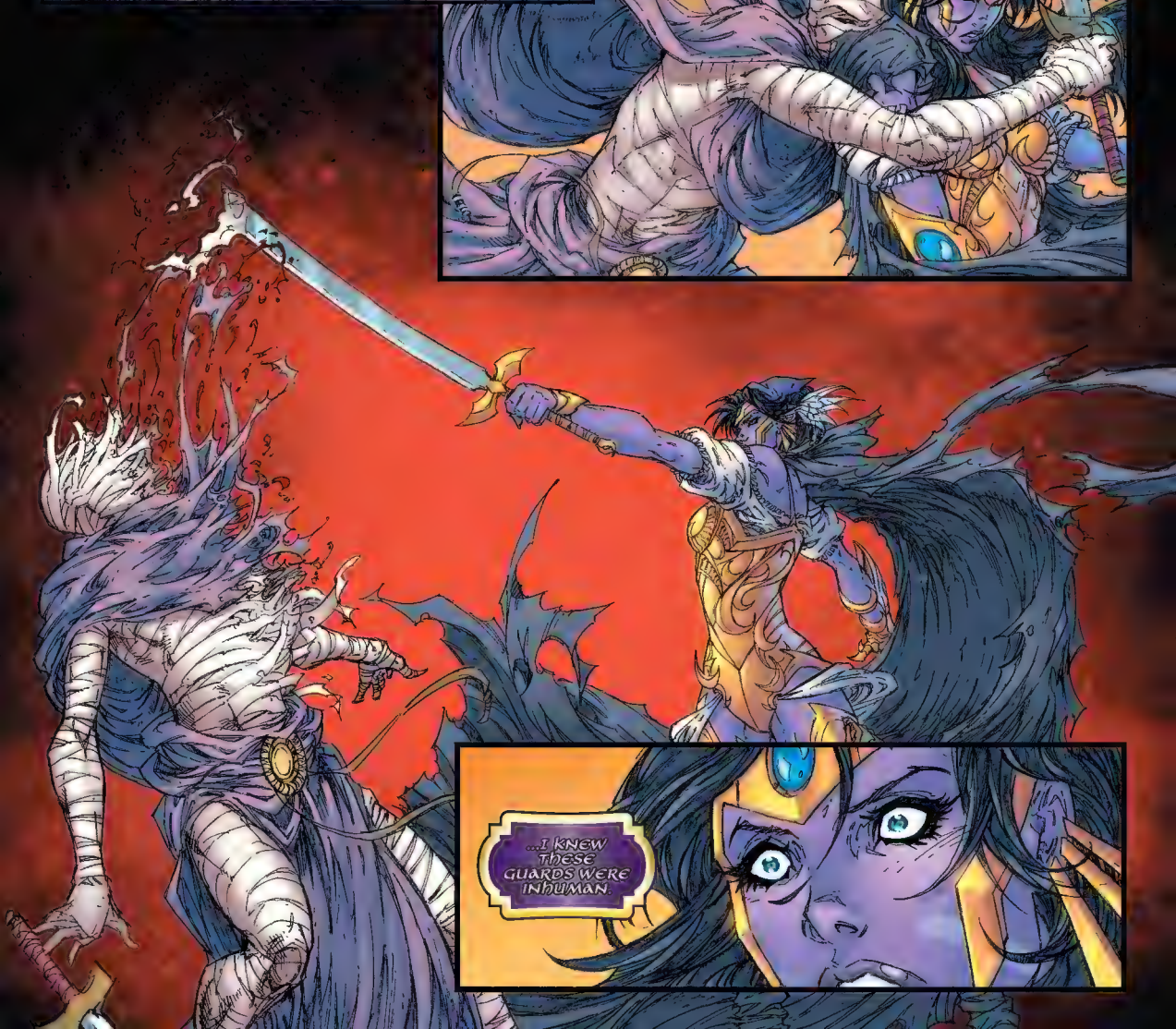




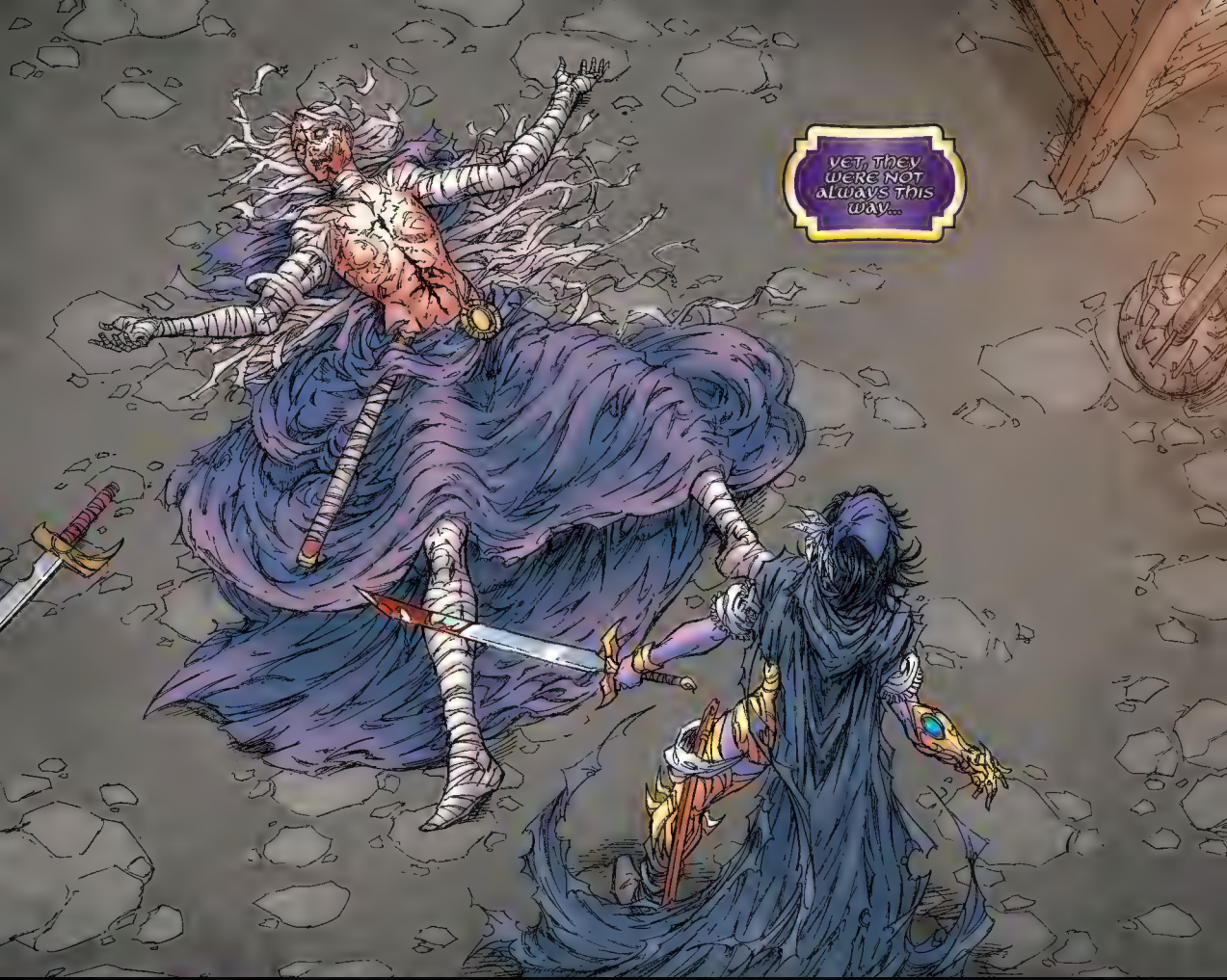
--AND
SOON, YOU
SHALL BE
TOO.



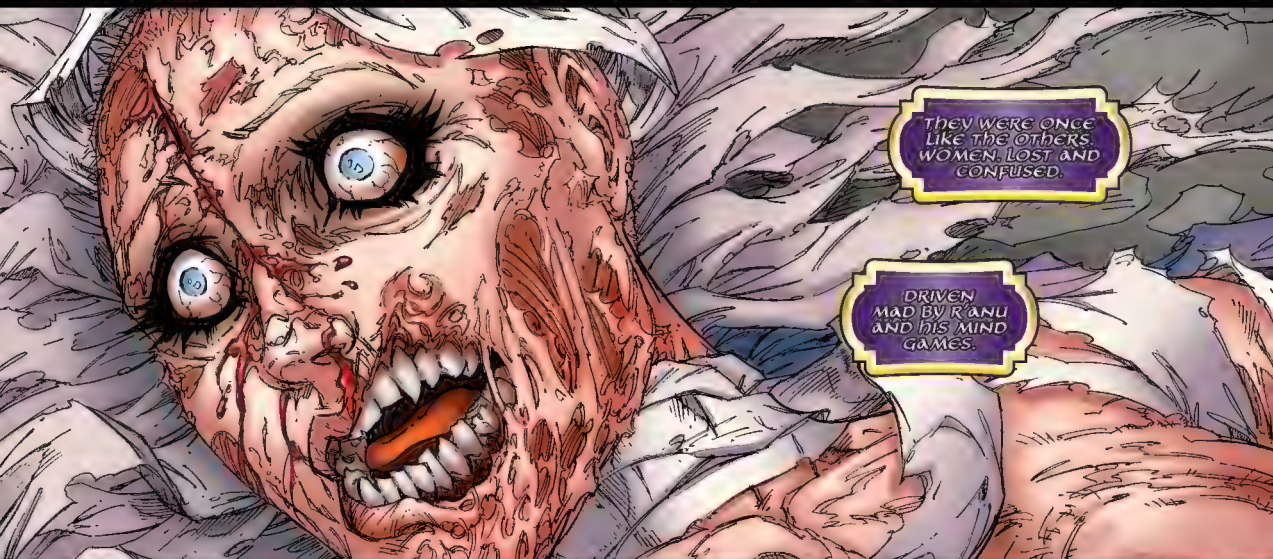
WITH THEIR
FREAKISH STRENGTH
AND INCREDIBLE
ENDURANCE...



...I KNEW
THESE
GUARDS WERE
INHUMAN.



YET, THEY
WERE NOT
ALWAYS THIS
WAY...

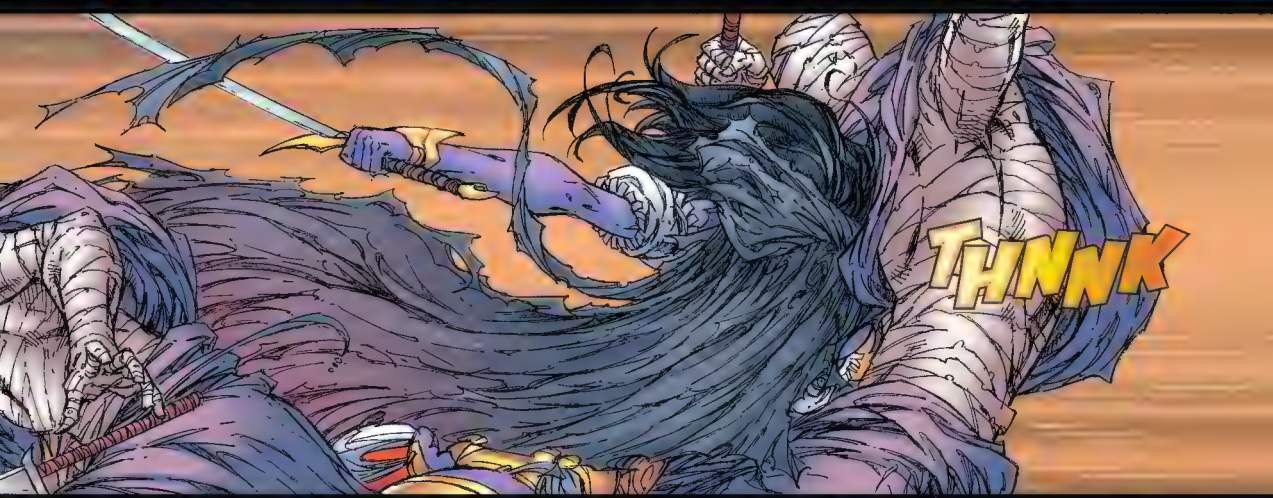


THEY WERE ONCE
LIKE THE OTHERS.
WOMEN, LOST AND
CONFUSED.

DRIVEN
MAD BY R'ANU
AND HIS MIND
GAMES.



YOU
MONSTER.









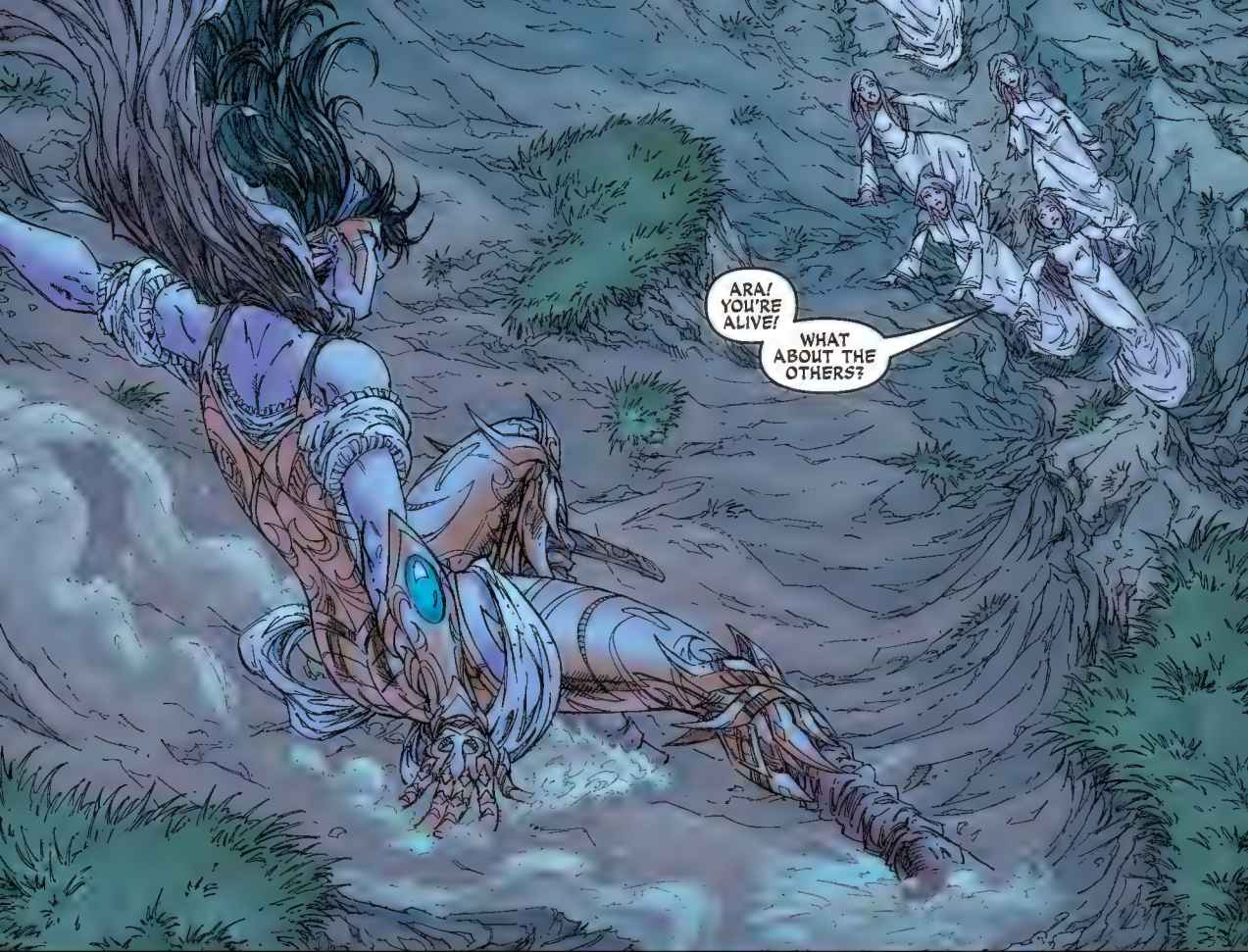
LOOK
WHAT YOU'VE
DONE!

IMIRAH,
THIS PLACE
WAS A PRISON
FOR YOU.

THIS PLACE
BROUGHT US
PEACE AND
SAFETY. WHAT
WILL HAPPEN
NOW?



FOR THE
FIRST TIME IN
A LONG TIME--
THAT IS UP
TO YOU.



ARA!
YOU'RE
ALIVE!

WHAT
ABOUT THE
OTHERS?



R'ANU
IS GONE, BUT
I WAS TOO LATE
TO SAVE THE
OTHERS.

THEY
ARE LOST UP
THERE.



WHAT ARE
WE TO DO, NOW?
WHERE SHALL
WE GO?

HOW
ARE WE TO
SURVIVE?



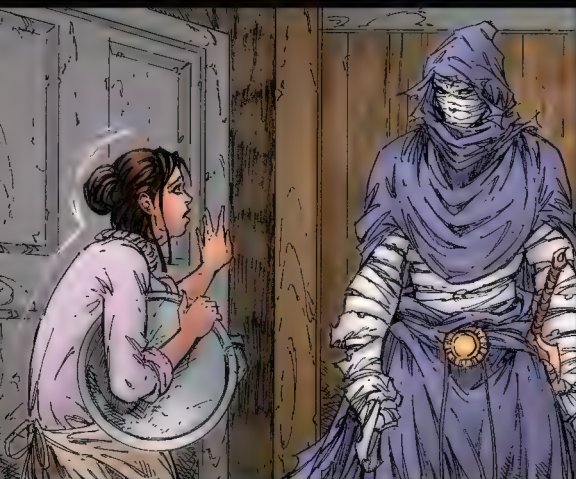
I HAVE
AN IDEA.





FROM NOW ON,
WE SHALL BE WAITED
UPON BY THE MEN OF THIS
VILLAGE, NOT THE WOMEN.
LET THEM SERVE FOR
A CHANGE.

Y-YES,
PRIESTESS.



YOU ARE
PLAYING THE
PART WELL,
KENSA.

YOU ARE
WHAT THEY
FEAR. IF YOU
LEAVE, WHAT IS TO
STOP THEM FROM
ENSLAVING US
AGAIN?



THEIR FEAR
OF WHAT MIGHT
HAPPEN IF THEY
DON'T.

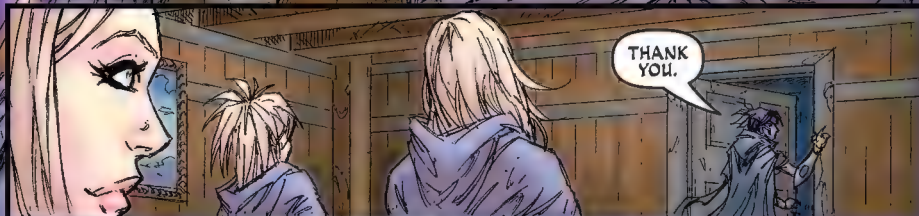
AND YOUR
STRENGTH. YOUR
WILL AND BELIEF.
YOU CAN DO
THIS.

WHY CAN'T
YOU STAY
WITH US?



I GAVE YOU
YOUR FREEDOM--
FREEDOM TO FOLLOW
YOUR OWN PATH. BUT I DO
NOT HAVE THE SAME LUXURY.
MY ROAD WAS SET LONG
AGO. I AM AT ITS
MERCY.

THEN WE
SHALL KEEP YOU
IN OUR PRAYERS. MAY
YOUR ROAD LEAD TO
WHERE YOU WANT
TO GO.



THANK
YOU.

CAN
I HELP
YOU?



MONTESSA.



REMEMBER
ME?

YOU?!
WHAT DO YOU
WANT?

I DON'T
HAVE ANY
ANSWERS
FOR YOU.

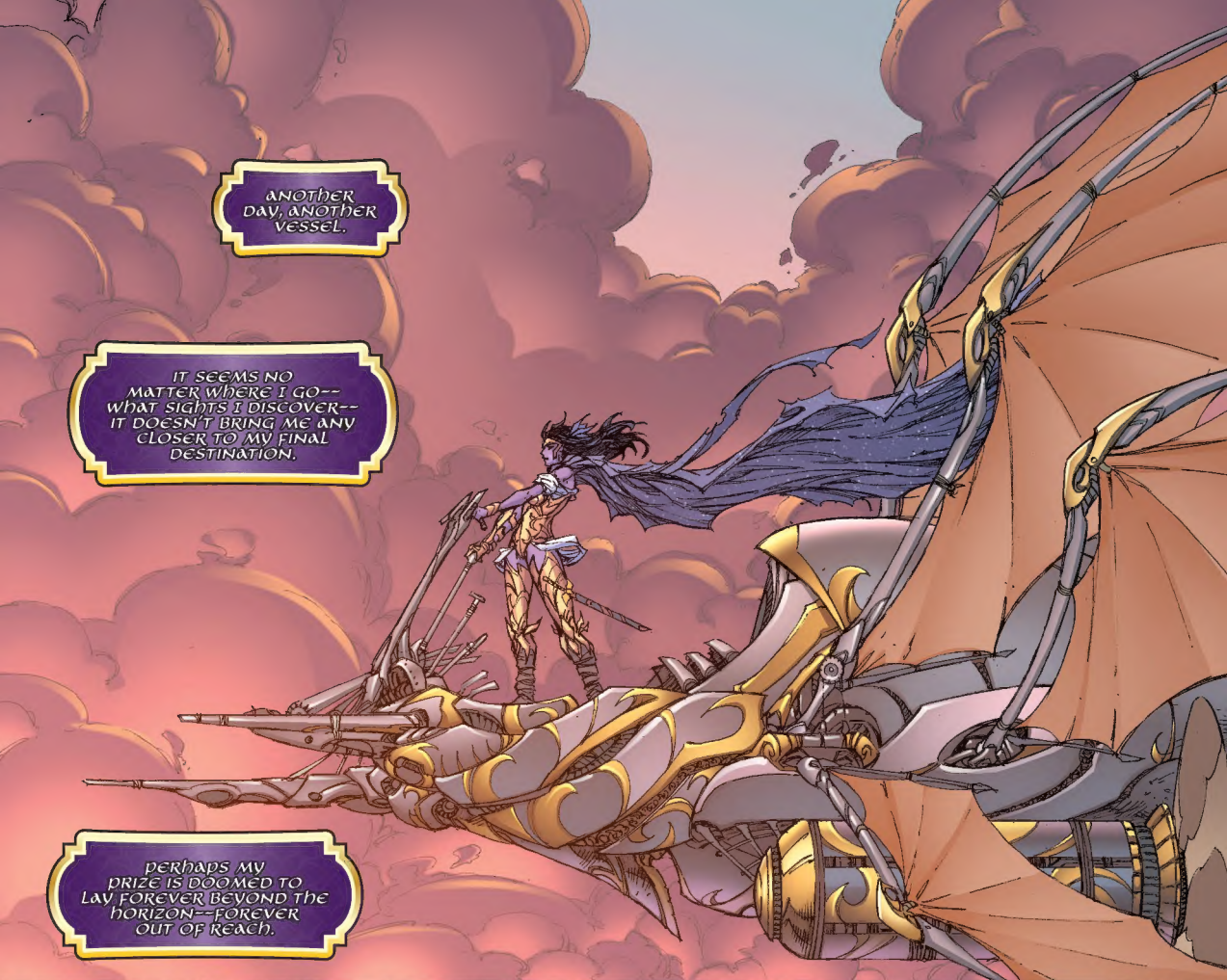
I DO
NOT KNOW
THE ONE YOU ARE
LOOKING FOR. THIS
TORINTHAL.



I UNDERSTAND.
YOU CAN'T HELP
GUIDE ME ON
MY QUEST.

BUT
YOU CAN
HELP ME GET
THERE.

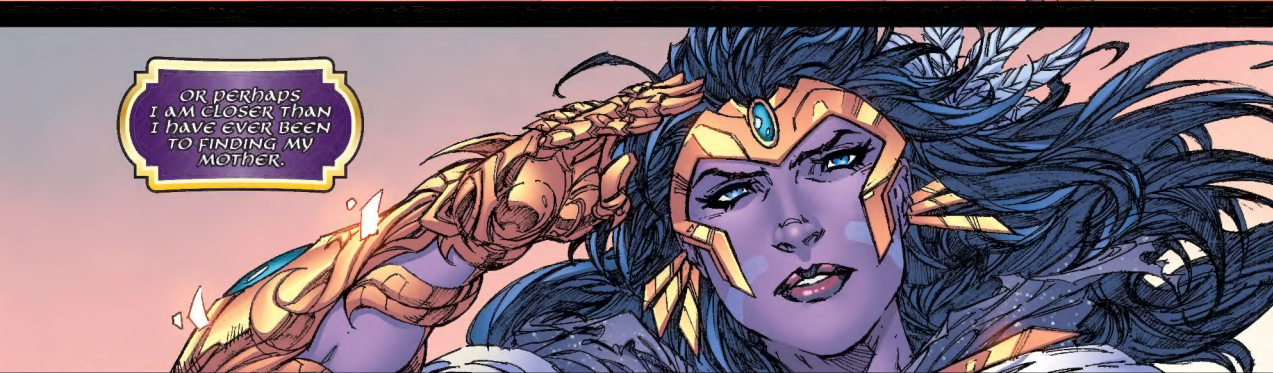




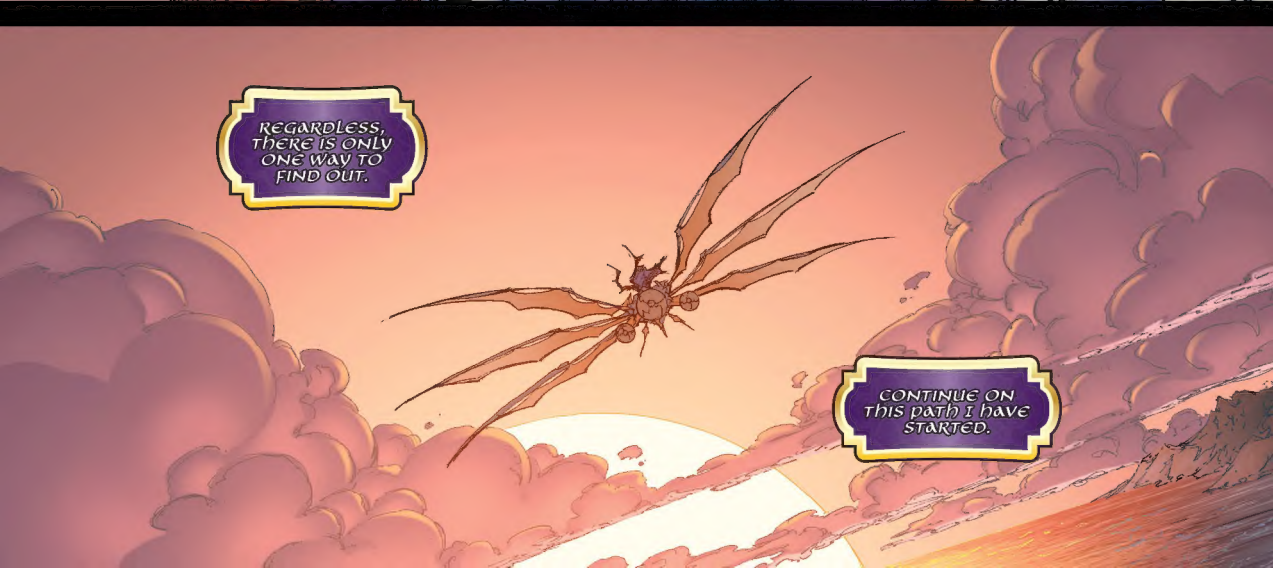
ANOTHER
DAY, ANOTHER
VESSEL.

IT SEEMS NO
MATTER WHERE I GO--
WHAT SIGHTS I DISCOVER--
IT DOESN'T BRING ME ANY
CLOSER TO MY FINAL
DESTINATION.

PERHAPS MY
PRIZE IS DOOMED TO
LIE FOREVER BEYOND THE
HORIZON--FOREVER
OUT OF REACH.



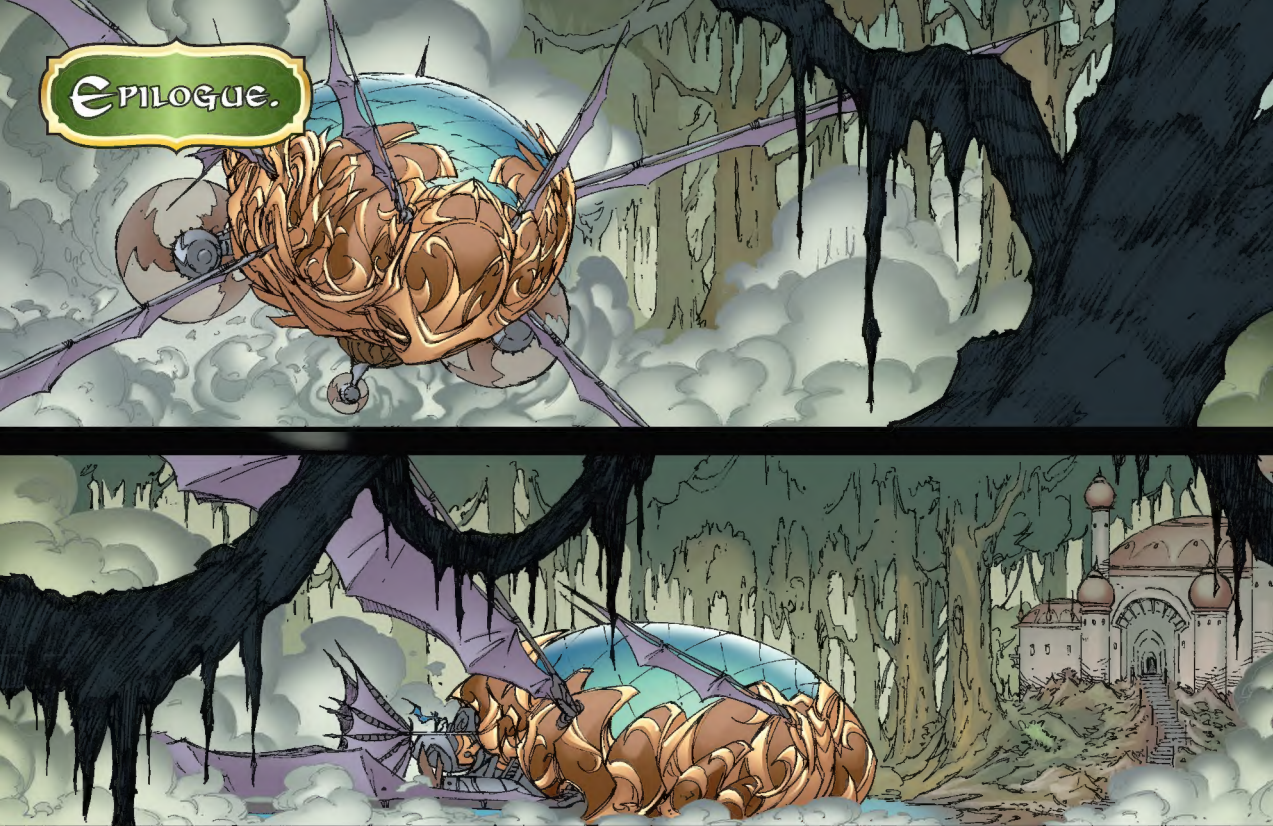
OR PERHAPS
I AM CLOSER THAN
I HAVE EVER BEEN
TO FINDING MY
MOTHER.



REGARDLESS,
THERE IS ONLY
ONE WAY TO
FIND OUT.

CONTINUE ON
THIS PATH I HAVE
STARTED.

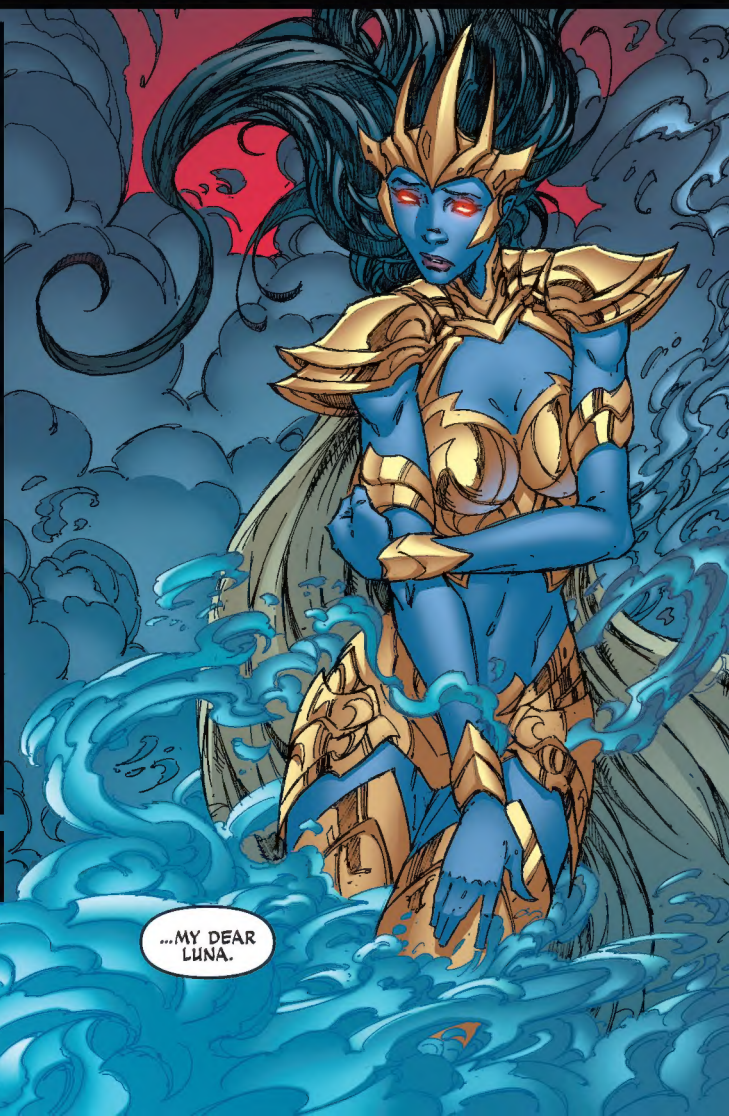
Epilogue.



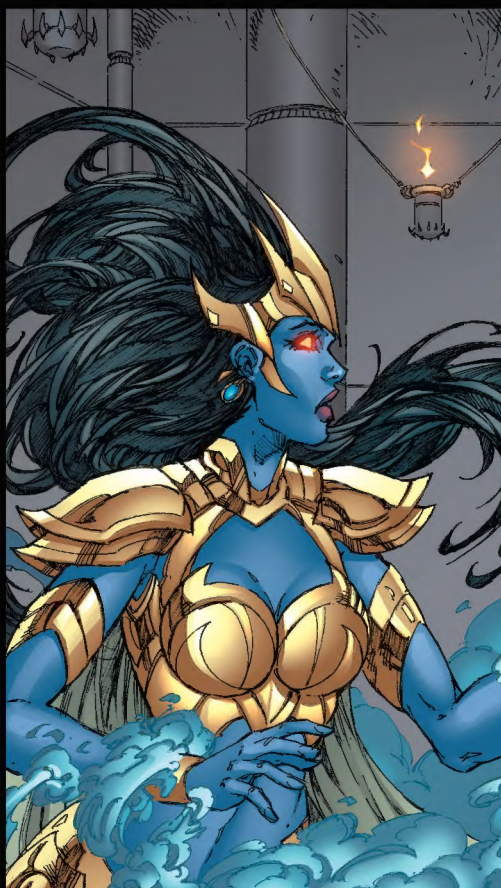
IT HAS
BEEN A LONG
JOURNEY.



YOU
PROBABLY
WANT A CHANCE TO
STRETCH YOUR
LEGS...



...MY DEAR
LUNA.





END
VOLUME
TWO.

COMING SOON...
THE FALL OF THE
D'JINN!